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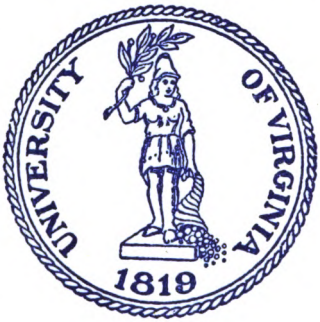

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TO HIS FATE

Sequel to "Dorothy Harcourt's Secret"

BY

MRS. E. D. E. N. SOUTHWORTH

AUTHOR OF

"A Deed Without a Name," "The Lost Heir," "A Noble Lord," "Sweet Love's Atonement," "Zenobia's Suitors," Etc.

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TO HIS FATE

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TO HIS FATE

CHAPTER I

TO THE ISLE OF STORMS

One Wednesday morning a jolly little party met by appointment in the hall of the Wesleyan Flats, in Washington.

There were Miss Fronde, Owlet, Titus, Tom and Lucy, besides Roma's faithful henchman, Lawyer Merritt, who had volunteered to escort them to the boat and see them off.

They left the house in a little procession. Lawyer Merritt and Miss Fronde led the way. Lucy, with little Owlet by the hand, followed next. Tom and Titus brought up the rear.

In this manner they walked up Fourteenth Street, where they found an empty car about to start.

They all got in. Roma Fronde would never have dreamed of taking a carriage for herself while she sent her poor protégés down in the street car. She made herself one of them.

They all rode down together, until they reached the terminus at F Street, where they left the car and took an avenue one to Georgetown. They got out at Green Street, and walked down a short distance to the wharf where the *John Gordon* lay, getting up her steam to start on her voyage to the Isle of Storms and other points.

Arrived on deck, the little party separated into groups.

Tom and Titus, to whom the interior of a steamboat was like

"Some forring countries for to see,"

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went off on an exploring expedition, roaming about wherever they were permitted to go.

Lucy sat down on a carpet chair and took Owlet on her lap. Lawyer Merritt and Roma Fronde seated themselves, side by side, on one of the benches that ran along the bulwarks of the boat.

"When shall you reach the isle?" inquired the lawyer.

"Some time to-night, between nine and twelve. There is no calculating the time to an hour," Roma replied.

"In the dead of night. And there is no steamboat landing on the isle. You will have to leave the steamer in an open boat."

"Yes; but it will be perfectly safe. No accident has ever occurred in the passage."

"But to reach the forsaken house late at night, my dear."

"Oh, it will be quite ready to receive us. I sent an agent down there last week, with instructions to the two old servants to have everything prepared for us, rooms aired, beds made, fires kindled—for fires are needed on the Isle of Storms even in May—and everything made comfortable for our whole party."

The steamboat bell tolled.

Mr. Merritt arose to take leave.

"How I wish you were going with us," Roma said.

"So do I, with all my heart and soul," he replied.

"But you will come down soon?"

"I shall certainly take a holiday and come. Good-by, my dear. God bless you," he said, heartily shaking hands with her. "Good-by, little Owl. Be very sure you don't get yourself lost or stolen again," he added, stooping to kiss the child.

"No, I just won't. I am possessed of common sense, I am. And I won't be served so two times. Aunt Lucy says if that man comes near me again, 'there'll be a foot race or a funeral.' So does Tom. So does Titus. So does everybody."

"And so do I!" exclaimed the lawyer, as he kissed her good-by.

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And with a final bow to Miss Fronde, he left the boat just a second before the gang plank was withdrawn, and the *John Gordon* backed from the wharf, turned and steamed away from the shore and down the river.

Our party were the only passengers on the little coasting steamer for that voyage. But for the captain and the crew they had it all to themselves.

Roma sat thinking sadly, bitterly, of her first voyage down river and bay to the Isle of Storms, that voyage begun so blithely at the break of day, ending so tragically—so mysteriously in the dark of midnight.

Truly she was not in the same boat, nor had she sailed from the same point now. She had purposely changed both to get rid of too painful associations at starting, yet memory troubled her all the same.

She knew, besides, that as soon as the boat should have left Washington, the scene would be the very same she had seen before, all the way down to the Isle of Storms.

She sat in the seat where Lawyer Merritt had left her, striving to throw off the depression that was stealing over her spirits.

None of her traveling companions were near her.

Tom and Titus were standing as near to the man at the wheel as they were permitted to approach, watching him steer, with curous interest.

Owlet was still seated on Lucy's lap. And now the secret of the black woman's attraction for the child might have been revealed to any spectator of the two. Owlet had found in Lucy a deeply interested listener to her wonderful "'ventures."

Lucy, who was a champion gossip, with an insatiable curiosity, led the child on to talk, by continually asking her leading and suggestive questions.

This "interview" went on for nearly an hour, and the boat was halfway to Alexandria, when at last Lucy had just asked:

"An' we'n yo' tell him yo' wan' go back to de lady yo' lub, wot dat w'ite herrin' say den?"

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"Oh! he said——" Owlet began, but just then she happened to look toward Miss Fronde, saw her sorrowful abstraction, jumped off Lucy's lap without a word of apology or explanation, and ran to her benefactress, exclaiming:

"Oh! oh! what is the matter with you? Have I been naughty?"

"No, dear child," answered the lady, encircling the little waist with her arm, and drawing Owlet to her bosom.

To avoid distressing her favorite, Miss Fronde made a supreme effort to throw off her despondency, and succeeded so well that even she began to enjoy the glorious morning, the broad sunlit river, the verdant shores with their lovely variety of cape and bay, of inlet and headland, of wooded hills and cultivated vales.

Roma knew all the history and traditions of her native state, and she told Owlet stories of the Potomac and its shores and tributaries; stories from the first settlement of the country down to the present day.

And Owlet listened with an interest which she would have scorned to show in the finest fairy tales that were not true.

This lasted until they reached Alexandria, where the little steamer stopped for an hour to take on freight, and then started again.

Below that old Virginian town the river widens almost like an arm of the sea.

Roma arose and led Owlet and beckoned to Titus, and the three went down in the saloon, where one table was set, and where the captain sat at the head and carved the boiled ham, while the clerk sat at the foot and carved the roast turkey. The passengers sat on either side. Such were the primitive customs on the little coasting steamer of the Chesapeake and its tributaries at that time.

Lucy and Tom took their dinners with the colored steward and stewardess, in whom they were delighted to recognize old acquaintances from Snowden.

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They were having a long, delightful, glorious run down river and bay through all that fresh, bright, breezy day.

They were now opposite Piney Point.

Roma gave Owlet a volume of Audubon's "Birds of America," with colored pictures to look over, in which the child soon became deeply interested.

Then she took her sedative knitting and worked at it.

Lucy lighted her old clay pipe and stole away by herself to a lonely spot on the deck, where she could enjoy her smoke without annoying anyone else.

Tom and Titus roamed about the boat, sometimes haunting the attractive vicinity of the man at the wheel, sometimes seating themselves astride the bulwarks, and sometimes trying to climb the masts, and constantly drawing upon themselves the rebuke of some one of the little crew, the sharp scolding of Lucy, or the solemn announcement of little Owlet that they were not possessed of common sense, and never would be.

So passed the long, delicious afternoon until tea-time, when the clerk of the boat again appeared at the head of the gangway and politely called the passengers to the table.

After tea, when Roma and her protégés returned to the deck, they found the broad expanse of water crimsoned over with the flush of the setting sun in the west, and silvered with the light of the rising moon in the east.

They were now near the mouth of the river.

Before them, on the north, was the faint outline of Point Lookout. Far across the waste of water, to the south, was that of Smith's Point. Between them the open bay.

Roma, with little Owlet sitting by her side, with her head on her lap, sat in the forward part of the boat, gazing on this scene, never wearying of it. The times of long ago came back to her. Family traditions stored in memory were revived. The actors in them lived and moved again.

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"The old ancestral spirits"

were about her. The sun sank beneath the waves, leaving the rich afterglow that lingered long before it faded away. The moon rose higher in the heavens.

How long she might have sat in this trance is doubtful if she had not been aroused by a voice at her side.

She turned and saw Lucy leaning against a mast, and looking very ill.

"Why, what is the matter, aunty? Are you sea-sick?" she inquired.

"Oh, Lor', young mist'ess, I feel powerful po'ly. De yiver is awful yough. Lor', how de boat does yoll! I 'spects I'll heave my heart up p'esently."

"It is always very rough rounding Smith's Point. Go and lie down, Lucy. It will be between three and four hours before we reach the isle," said Miss Fronde.

"An' jes' look at dat chile, honey, gone fas' 'sleep with her head onto yo' lap. She'll tire ob you' to deaf. Better le' me take her inter yo' stateroom and pit her to bed."

"No, aunty. I think it will be as much as you can do to put yourself to bed, and you had better not lose any more time about it either. I will carry the child to her berth," Miss Fronde replied, as she lifted the little one, who heaved a sigh of profound content, but did not awake.

As Roma passed on with little Owlet in her arms, she saw Tom and Titus sitting side by side on a bench.

They were both staring at the wonderful revolving light on the top of the lighthouse on Smith's Point, which they were now approaching.

"Titus, my boy, had you not better go down and turn in? You are not quite strong yet," Roma said, as she came up to the lads.

"Oh! please ma'am, I don't feel tired nor yet sleepy! And I do want to stay up till we round that point where the waltzing light is," pleaded the boy.

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"But, my dear, it is very rough, and growing rougher every minute. It will be very trying to you, rounding Smith's Point."

"Yes, mist'ess," put in Tom, "and I is dat sick dis berry minnit, if it wa'n't fo' Titus a-wantin' to stare at dat yonder light, I'd crawl away an' lay down, I would."

"Well, go with your mother. I will look after Titus after I have put this child to bed."

"Come 'long, yo' fool boy! Yo' look des as sick as I feels! Come 'long, tell yo', fo' de wus come to de wus," growled Lucy, taking her son by the ear, lifting him up, and marching him on before her.

"Do you want me to go, too, mum? Because if you do I'm bound to go," said Titus, with the loyalty of a little knight.

"No, my boy. Upon reflection I do not think it will hurt you to stay here. You are not seasick. Convalescents from severe fevers seldom are so. And the night is so mild and clear, and the air so pure that you are not likely to take any harm. I will soon return to sit with you," Miss Fronde said, as she passed on with the child in her arms and went down to her stateroom.

She did not undress Owlet, because there would be no time to dress her again, when she should have to wake her at the last moment to take the rowboat to the Isle of Storms. She only loosened her clothes and laid her down on the outside of the lower berth.

Then she returned to the deck and called Titus to leave his old seat and come forward with her, where he could have even a better view of the revolving light.

While they sat there she told him all she knew about lighthouses, in which subject the boy became much interested.

The water grew terribly rough, the boat rolled and tumbled about among the waves, as if tempest-tossed; but neither the lady nor the lad grew seasick.

Hour after hour passed.

They had rounded Smith's Point. They were out in

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the open bay. The moon had risen to the zenith, and all the sea was bathed in silver light, when the boat stopped, and a man at the head of the gangway sang out:

"Passengers for the Isle of Storms get ready to land!"

"Go: and wake up Tom and his mother," said Miss Fronde to her faithful little knight.

Titus pulled his red hair in way of salute, and instantly ran off on his errand.

Roma went to her stateroom and gently wakened little Owlet. It took a few minutes to make the child realize the situation; but when she did, she was wide awake, all alert and full of interest and excitement.

Miss Fronde arranged Owlet's dress and took her on deck.

Lucy and Tom were already there, and Titus was standing near them.

Never seemed the moon so radiant. The whole scene was bathed in light. It was almost as bright as day. Before them, about a quarter of a mile off, lay the Serpent, or the Isle of Storms, like some huge, prehistoric, marine monster, lying darkly on the silvery water.

The rowboat was manned, and the captain of the steamer assisted Miss Fronde and little Owlet into their seats. Tom and Titus carefully lowered Lucy, and then followed her and took their own seats.

The captain, standing on the deck, raised his cap to the lady. The men laid themselves to their oars, and the boat was off.

As they neared the isle they saw lights flashing from the front windows of the mansion house.

"They are up, waiting for us," said Miss Fronde.

"An' look a dere!" exclaimed Lucy, pointing to a hut on a knoll just west of the great house. "Dere's my old log house! An' glory be to Him! dere's a light inter it! How dat? Young mist'ess, did you yite to Yusalem an' tell him how yo' was gwine to b'ing we dem, Tom an' me, back down yere to de ole Sarpint long ob yo'?"

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"Yes, I did," said Miss Fronde.

"Dere! I knowed it! An' dey's done kin'le a fire for me in de ole house!"

They landed. All the stores were taken out of the boat and put into the new boathouse for the night. Roma thanked the boatmen, who lifted their caps in salute as they rowed off again to rejoin their steamer.

Miss Fronde, taking Owlet by the hand, led the way through the sand, up the rocky side of the crest, through the stubble field, through the shrubbery, and so on to the house.

Jerusalem and Violet—or Wilet, as she was sometimes called—in their best clothes, stood on the front porch waiting for the party.

"P'oud to see yo' back, young mist'ess," said the two, speaking simultaneously, the man with a bow, the woman with a courtesy.

"Thank you both. I am happy to come," answered Miss Fronde, as they all entered the lighted hall.

"Supper yeady in de dinin' yoom, an' beds made an' fires kin'led in de bedyooms, young mist'ess," said Wilet.

"Thank you. We had tea on the boat, and do not need supper so late. But we need sleep, so we will go to our rooms," said Miss Fronde.

CHAPTER II

"BEGINNING OF THE END"

THE sun was rising above the wooded hills east of Logwood, when the night train, by which Will Harcourt traveled, ran into the little station.

There was no hack or carriage of any description about the place.

Harcourt would therefore have to walk the whole of the five or six miles that lay between the station and the Hall.

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In his great anxiety to hear of his mother's condition, he stopped a few moments after he had left the train to make inquiries of the ticket agent, well knowing that he, as well as everybody in that secluded neighborhood, would know the circumstances of everybody else.

"Glad to see you back, Mr. Harcourt," said Preston, the agent, in answer to the traveler's salutation and question. "But sorry to have to tell you that Mrs. Harcourt is very ill. Dr. Wall was in here last evening just after he had returned from seeing her, and reported her as very low. But perhaps I ought not to have told you," added the young man, seeing how Harcourt's countenance changed.

"Oh, yes! I asked you for the truth, and you told me the truth. I thank you. Good-morning," said the poor fellow, as he turned from the window.

He left the little station, and started at a rapid pace along the country road that led up wooded hills and down cultivated dales from Logwood to Lone Lodge.

In little more than an hour he reached the house, very much exhausted from his long and rapid walk.

Silas Wynthrop, Jr., met him at the door.

"My mother?" was all the young man could say, and he asked the question before the other could utter one word of welcome.

"She is easy at present. She is sleeping well. Mr. Harcourt, you should have telegraphed, and we would have sent the carriage to meet you. You have walked all the way from Logwood Station, after your long journey from New York, and you look to be thoroughly worn out. Come in at once, and get some breakfast. We are just about to sit down to the table," said young Wynthrop, as he led the way along the hall.

"Oh, thank you. But I must go to my mother first," Harcourt replied.

"You had better not just now. She is sleeping well, as I told you. Her room is as dark and silent as a cave. Dr. Lathrop, who has spent the night in

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the house, has just had his breakfast, and gone in to take mother's place at her bedside, and he sent out strict orders to let no one, not even the colored nurse, enter the room or come near the door, for fear of disturbing her before she shall wake naturally—so vitally necessary is this unbroken sleep. He said he would let us know when she wakes."

Harcourt looked puzzled and undecided.

"Now you see how it is. You can do nothing but harm by going to her bedside. Be patient. Come and join us at breafast."

"Thank you. You are very good to us," Harcourt replied, and followed young Wynthrop to the room in which all the family were already seated at the table.

Everyone rose to shake hands with him. Mrs. Wynthrop made a place for him next to herself at the head of the board. He could make only a mere pretense of eating, but he drank a large cup of strong coffee, and felt physically refreshed.

Various members of the family party around the table made kind inquiries concerning Harcourt's health, and his journey from New York, to all of which he made such answers as were possible under the circumstances. He asked but few questions about his mother's illness, contenting himself for the present with the report he had received from Silas Wynthrop, and reserving all further inquiries to be put to the doctor and the nurse.

Breakfast was scarcely over, and the party was still seated at the tabie, when Dr. Lathrop quietly entered the room and said:

"Our patient is awake, and, as I had hoped from her prolonged and profound sleep, she has awakened to consciousness—that is, to the perfect knowledge of persons and places, though not to a comprehension of circumstances. She has still her illusions. She—— Oh, how do you do, Will? Didn't see you before! Glad to see you now, though!" he broke off and exclaimed, as he first perceived the presence of

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the young man, and went around the table to welcome him.

Harcourt arose and held out his hand, saying:

"How do you do, Dr. Lathrop? How, really, is my dear mother to-day? And how soon may I see her?"

"She is better, my boy, as I have just said. And you may see her at once. She seems to be expecting you. She asked if you had been sent for—if you were on your way home, and if you had come."

"I will go to her immediately," said Harcourt, moving toward the door.

Mrs. Wynthrop rose to accompany him, but changed her mind and sat down again, saying:

"As Mrs. Harcourt is expecting him, it is better that he should enter her presence alone. And, no doubt, by this time Martha is in attendance upon her mistress."

"Oh, yes! I found Martha sitting like a watchdog at her chamber door as I came out, and I sent her in to take my place," said Dr. Lathrop.

Harcourt went to his mother's room and rapped softly.

"Come in," said the voice of the faithful negro nurse.

Harcourt silently turned the knob of the door and entered.

The blinds had been opened when the sleeper had awakened, and the room was full of the early morning light.

Dorothy Harcourt lay propped up in bed. She was wasted almost to a skeleton, and her skin was white as lime. Her dark eyes glowed from their deep sockets with strange fire.

Martha stood by her mistress' bedside with a small, china bowl in one hand and a silver teaspoon in the other, with which she was feeding the invalid.

"Ole mist'ess, honey, yere is youn' Marse Will come to see yo'," she said, in a low, soft tone of voice.

"Oh, come—come, my boy. I have waited for you so long!" panted the dying woman, in a faint but eager

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voice, holding out her arms in longing love, and then letting them drop in exhaustion.

"My dear mother!" he whispered, in a broken voice, as he went and knelt beside her bed, put his arms around her and kissed her gently.

Again she raised her arms to put them around his neck, and again they slid down and dropped upon the counterpane in utter weakness—the weakness of approaching dissolution, as her son too surely knew.

He lifted these feeble, wasted hands to his face, kissed them, and drew them around his neck until they met; but he instantly saw that the position fatigued her, and he drew them away, kissed them again and tenderly laid them down on the coverlet.

Then he rose and seated himself in the watcher's chair beside her bed.

If she had in any degree recovered from her happy hallucinations he had no means of proving as yet, for he dared not put any suggestive questions. He feared to talk to her at all, lest he should the faster waste her failing strength.

He only ventured to say:

"Dr. Lathrop tells me that you are much better this morning, mother dear."

"Yes—better," she faltered, in a feeble voice.

"I am so thankful to hear it," he murmured, in a low tone.

And then there was silence in the sick room for a short space. The dying woman was too far gone to talk much, and her son was too fearful of exhausting her feeble stock of vitality to do so.

But at last she said, in a tone so low and faint as to be scarcely audible, even when he bent his ear to her lips to try to hear her:

"You are getting on well, my Will?"

"Much better than I deserve, dear mother," he murmured, caressing her gray head with a tender touch.

"No, no, no," she breathed, faintly; "my good son—deserves—to do well. God bless him."

Then she seemed to sink away into sleep, or swoon,

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Harcourt could not tell which. In some alarm, he bent over the quiet face, and then raised his eyes inquiringly to those of Martha, who shook her head, but smiled, as much as to convey the idea that he must not speak to her or try to rouse her, for it was all right.

Then the woman got up and stole silently out of the room.

A few minutes later Mrs. Wynthrop came in quietly, with her finger on her lips, as a sign of silence, took the chair just vacated by Martha, looked at Harcourt, and mutely pointed to the door. Harcourt followed the index, and saw Martha standing there, beckoning him.

He got up and went out to her, and followed her, still in silence, into the adjoining parlor and down its whole length to the front windows, the most distant part of the room from the door leading into the sick chamber.

"Set down, Marse Will. Yo' look tired to deaf, an' no won'er," said the woman.

The young man sank into a deep "sleepy hollow."

Martha, unceremoniously, seated herself on the window sill, and said:

"I t'ought as 'ow you'd like to year all 'bout de ole madam's 'tack."

"Yes, indeed, Martha, I am very anxious to hear. When was my mother taken worse?" he inquired.

"Day 'fo' yes'd'y, Marse Will. It were 'bout free o'clock in de arternoon. An' she were settin' in de yockin'-ch', de ole madam were, an' I was a-stan'in' 'fo' her, holdin' ob a hank ob yarn on my wrises, wi'ch she were windin' on a ball fo' her knittin', de ole mist'ess were, an' all ob a sudden I year her say: 'Yes, Ev'ard; yes, I'm comin'.' Well, Marse Will, I so used to yearin' de old madam talk to dead people, 'special de dead an' gone ole marse, dat I didn't pay s' much 'tention as I used to did, no' likewise have de creeps nor feel de icicles meltin' down my backbone. De yeels gits used to de skinnin', so dey say,

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an' I'd got usen to de ghoses, so I didn' pay no 'tention 'till she say ag'in:

"'Yes, Ev'ard; yes. As soon's I have done windin' dis hank o' yarn,' de ole madam say to de ghose ob de ole marse w'at I couldn' see nor likewise year myself."

"She still has those fancies?"

"Yes, marse, worse'n eber. But she nebber finish windin' dat hank ob yarn. No, sah. De words was sca'ce out'n her mouf, 'fo' de ball ob yarn drop out'n her han' an' yoll down on de flo', an' de ole madam fall back in her cha' like she was dead, de ole madam did. An' oh, Lor', I nebber was so sca'ed in my life. I yun an' call Miss Marg'et an' de ole lady, an' dey come in, an' w'en dey see de ole madam layin' back dat a way, dey sent Mr. Silence off on horseback to Logwood to fetch Dr. Wall; an' dey und'ess de ole mist'ess an' put her to bed, an' did all dey could to fetch her youn', an' was as good to de ole mist'ess 's if she'd been deir own mammy, dem ladies was."

"Go on," Harcourt said.

"Well, Marse Will, de doctor come back long o' Mr. Silence, an' when he sees de ole madam, he say how yo' mus' be sent fo' yight away, de doctor say, an' Miss Marg'et—oh, she's de young gal fo' my money, Miss Marg'et is—she go, she do, an' harnesses up de pony cha' her own self an' d'ives to Logwood to sen' off a tel'g'am to you'. An' Dr. Wall he stay all night by de ole mist'ess' bedside. An' in de mo'nin', arter a yearly breakfas', he went to Logwood an' sent back old Marse Dr. La'fop, wot doan' p'actice no med'cine now, but come to 'tend de ole madam fo' ole sake's sake. Well, Marse Will, one or t'oder ob de doctors, ha' been 'long ob de ole madam day an' night ebber since she were tuck."

"Go on."

"Young marse, der ain't no mo' go on to do. De ole madam come to herse'f a little bit nex' mo'nin' arter she were tuck, an' den 'lapsed yight back 'g'in. An' she's been gwine on dat way ebber since, sometimes a-comin' to, sometimes a-fallin' 'way, des like

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she's been a-doin' ob ris bressed mo'nin', on'y I know as she's been a dreat deal mo' herse'f dis mo'nin' dan ebber she's been since she were fi's' tuck, I does so—but weaker. Oh, yes, I mus' say weaker, a dreat deal weaker," said the woman, with a sigh.

"Martha, since her last attack has your mistress got over her hallucinations?" inquired Harcourt.

"Her—w'at, Marse Will?"

"Her fancies that the departed are still about her? That she talks with them?"

"Lor', no, Marse Will. An' Lor' forbid as she should get ober ob 'em now! No, Marse Will. Dough 'deed she doane talk to 'em much as she use to, de ole madam don't. I 'spects she is too tired to talk to anybody, libin' or dead, now."

"But you are sure she has still the same fancies?"

"Hi, Marse Will, who yo' finks is a fool! Not me! Not Marfy Ann Mungumberry! No, sah! I been long o' de ole madam, 'oman an' gal, long 'nough to know her ways, I hab! Yes, sah! De ole madam had de same happy t'oughts, dough she doane gib went to dem to de same deg'ee as she used to do. Too feeble now, yo' know."

"Ah, yes, too feeble!" assented the young man, with a sigh. Then he inquired:

"Has Dr. Lathrop left the house yet, do you know?"

"I yeckon not, Marse Will. Yo' know as ole Marse Dr. La'fop done gib up p'actice long ago. He on'y comes yere out'n f'iendship fo' de ole madam, w'ich yo' hab heern say as him an' de ole madam was f'ien's ebber since dey was bofe little chil'en."

"I will go and try to find Dr. Lathrop," said the young man, rising. "And if my mother should wake before I return, let me know, Martha."

"Yes, Marse Will, cert'ly."

Harcourt found the physician, who was more than eighty years of age, pacing up and down the floor of the front piazza, enjoying the fresh morning air.

"Dr. Lathrop," said the young man, joining him, "I have come out to offer you my warmest thanks

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for your invaluable attentions to my mother. How can I ever be grateful enough?"

"My dear boy, your mother is my oldest living friend. My one lifelong contemporary. As babies, more than three-quarters of a century ago, we used to kiss and scratch each other; as boy and girl, quarrel and make up; and from that time, through maturity, decline and old age, we have been grave, devoted old friends. Think what a bond that is, my boy—more than of mere kindred," said the aged physician.

"Yes, I know. Not always are friends so faithful through life."

"When my old friend goes, the world will be very lonesome to me, Will."

Harcourt sighed and inquired:

"What is my mother's real condition, under appearances, doctor? What are her chances of longer life?"

"Ah! my dear boy, how willingly would I give you hope if it were possible to do so! But I cannot, dear Will. For even your own unprofessional and inexperienced eyes must recognize the sad truth."

"I do! Oh, I do! I only wish to know how many days, or hours, I may hope to have my dear mother with me."

"I cannot tell you, Will. 'Of the day and the hour knoweth no man.' She may stay with us one, two, possibly three or more days, or she may leave us within the hour. I do not wish to offer you commonplaces, Will. No, these commonplaces seem to the mourner, in the first wounds of bereavement, mere 'vanity and vexation of spirit.' They cannot receive the words, though the words may contain the highest truth, the holiest love. So I will not tell you that 'our loss is her gain.' But here is something plain and practical, Will: That dear lady, as well as myself, has reached the age when 'great strength' has become 'labor and sorrow.' Yea, verily, 'the grasshopper is a burden.' But now she goes to an immortal life of perfect health, of eternal youth, of everlasting advancement in wisdom, goodness, useful-

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ness and happiness. She goes to all her loved ones gone before. Will you remember that, Will, and not think your mother's old friend intrusive to recall it to your memory?" said Dr. Lathrop, taking the young man's hand and looking apologetically in his face, as if he would have added: "Ah! I have offered you commonplaces, after all."

"Thank you. I will try. Thank you," said Harcourt, in a broken voice.

The summons came even sooner than the doctor had hinted at.

The last words had scarcely left Will Harcourt's lips before Mrs. Wynthrop came out to them with a face that made words needless.

She only said:

"Come in."

The two men followed her into the chamber of death, and they gathered around the bed of the fast dying woman.

Dorothy Harcourt smiled as she recognized her beloved son, and in that smile her spirit passed to her eternal home.

Harcourt gazed into the still, placid face, and raised his eyes with a stare of wild inquiry to the face of the aged physician, who understood the unuttered question, and answered, solemnly:

"Yes, it is all over."

Harcourt bowed his head down on the bosom of the dead and wept aloud.

No one disturbed him. No one stirred until his storm of anguish had exhausted itself.

Then it was Silas Wynthrop, the elder, who gently passed his arm around the waist of the young man, raised, and led him out of the room of death, whispering:

"The Lord giveth, and the Lord taketh away. Blessed be the name of the Lord."

No word of sympathy he uttered. He knew that this was not the time to speak. He was not one of those dull, well-meaning persons who, never having

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suffered, do not really know any better than to vex the wounded spirit with "words, words, words."

He led his young guest to the chamber that had been prepared for him, placed him in an easy resting-chair, pressed his hand with earnest affection, and left the room, softly shutting the door after him.

While Harcourt remained shut in with his sorrow the kind family below stairs attended to all the necessary details of the situation.

No one disturbed him in his solitude until noon, when Mrs. Wynthrop sent his mother's old servant, Martha, to him with a tray on which was arranged a cup of strong coffee, a dish of poached eggs, and a plate of toast, all covered with a white napkin.

Martha found him sitting sideways in the large chair, bowed upon one of its high arms. So deep was his absorption in sorrow that he did not hear her enter the room, or perceive her presence in it until she had come to his side, touched his arm, and said:

"Marse Will—honey—chile—look up yere an' yeat sumfin'. Do, now, like a good ge'man."

He raised his head and took the cup of coffee, sighing forth only the words:

"Oh, Martha!"

But even this was too much for the poor black woman's self-control. She hastily set the tray on a table near, dropped down on a hassock, threw her apron over her head, and burst into a storm of sobs, tears and loud lamentations, after the manner of her race.

Harcourt knew that the best course for him to pursue under these circumstances would be to "let her have her cry out."

After a few minutes she grew calmer, sat up, wiped her eyes, and took herself to task:

"Mouthy putty bereavement fo' a 'oman o' my age! Have no mo' 'trol ober myse'f 'an a nussin' baby! Mis' Wyn'op nebber 'lowed me to come up yere ef she'd t'ought I was gwine carry on sich bad behavement as dis. I begs yo' pardon, Marse Will—honey. 'Deed I does!"

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"Hush, poor Martha! You could not help it. How could you? Please go down now, and tell Mrs. Wynthrop how much I thank her and her kind family for all their goodness to me and to my mother. I suppose I ought to rouse myself and go out to attend to—to——"

He paused, feeling himself in danger of breaking down at the thought of what he had to attend to.

"Now doane 'stress yo'self, Marse Will! Dem dere fings is too much fo' you' at dis p'esent time. 'Sides which, de fam'bly is 'tendin' to eberyfing; Mis' Wyn'op and Miss Marg'et is seein' arter eberfing inter de house, and Mister Wyn'op an' Mr. Silence is seein' arter eberfing out'n de house. An' ole Marse Dr. La'fop have gone to Logwood to see de—de—de—— Oh, my Lor'!" suddenly broke off and exclaimed Martha, catching up her tray and hurrying out of the room to prevent another outburst of sorrow in the presence of the young master.

Harcourt was not disturbed again until he was summoned to dinner by Margaret Wynthrop, when he begged to be excused and declined all refreshments.

Later in the afternoon, however, he felt that he really must go downstairs and take his proper part in the duties of the occasion.

He got up and arranged his disordered dress, and went below to the door of the family sitting room and rapped.

Margaret Wynthrop opened the door.

He had not seen her since that morning at the early breakfast. She held out her hand, and said softly:

"Come in, Mr. Harcourt. Papa is in his office, and mamma and Betty are in——" She dropped her impulsive sentence, half finished, and said: "They will all be here presently."

Harcourt understood her and sighed deeply.

"Now will you take this seat by this window? Here is a pleasant breeze coming in."

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He bowed and sank into the offered armchair beside the window, overlooking the flower garden.

This was the only open window in the house. All the shutters of the others having been closed in honor of the departed.

The fresh evening air came in laden with the reviving fragrance of a thousand flowers that cheered and refreshed him, in the midst of his sorrow.

"I have been selfish and self-indulgent in my grief, Miss Wynthrop. I have come down at last to take hold of my duty; though I know so little what that duty should be that I must consult your father," he said at last.

"There is nothing for you to do, or that it would be proper for you to do, for a few days, but rest quietly and try to get up your strength. Your friends should and will do all that is required to be done. Papa will tell you so when you see him. But, of course, if you have any special wishes, you have only to suggest them to any of us to have them followed," said Margaret Wynthrop.

"Heavens! how good you all are to me! How can I ever thank you sufficiently," he breathed.

She looked at him gravely and without speaking.

"It is almost impious to talk of thanking angels for their gracious ministrations—is it not?" he inquired, with a sad smile.

Still she regarded him in silence for some moments, and he was beginning to grow anxious in his conjectures as to what she might be thinking about, when she said, gravely and sweetly:

"Mr. Harcourt, you exaggerate our plain and simple course of duty and friendship. Here is papa!" she exclaimed, with a smile of relief, as Mr. Wynthrop entered the room.

The elder man advanced directly to the younger one and held out his hand, saying cordially:

"I am glad to see you down, Harcourt."

"Thank you, sir. And I thank you, too, for all your thoughtful kindness," said Will.

"Not at all! Not at all! Don't mention it! It was

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nothing more than right," said Silas Wynthrop, heartily, pressing Harcourt's hand, and then throwing himself wearily upon a seat.

Soon Mrs. Wynthrop and her second daughter, Miss Betty, came in.

They greeted their guest with grave courtesy, and then sat down to their sewing.

The conversation became general and interesting, serious but not gloomy.

With delicate tact these women won their young friend from his deep despondency, which—in their utter ignorance of his heavy secret sorrows—they were inclined to think inordinate in any Christian man.

He joined the family at tea, but spent the night in sitting beside his mother's body.

CHAPTER III

TO HIS FATE

THREE days later the funeral of Dorothy Harcourt took place. The solemn ceremonies commenced at Lone Lodge and concluded at St. Mary's Church, Logwood.

All her old friends and neighbors from far and near came in their own carriages to pay their last respects to the memory of the departed.

There was a great multitude gathered at Lone Lodge, so that the house could scarcely hold the people or the yard the carriages.

Therefore, though there were but three hired hacks, a very long procession followed the remains to their last resting place in St. Mary's Cemetery, Logwood.

After the last sad rites were over, "dust to dust and ashes to ashes" had been said, and the last prayers had been offered and the last benediction pronounced and friends and neighbors re-entered their carriages and dispersed to their widely distant dwell-

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ings, Will Harcourt returned with the Wynthrops to Lone Lodge, but only with the intention of packing his valise, bidding farewell to his friends and leaving again to catch the night train to Washington.

But he reached the Lodge so pale and haggard, so weary in body and spirit, that, at the urgent entreaty of the Wynthrops, he consented to stay until the next day.

After he had retired to his room that night, but before he had undressed, he heard a gentle rap at his chamber door.

"Come in," he said, in the confident expectation of seeing old Martha. And indeed the visitor was no other than that faithful servant.

"Find a seat, Martha. You are too tired to stand," said Harcourt, kindly, seeing that the poor black woman had courtesied, folded her arms and stood respectfully, as if waiting to be spoken to before speaking.

"T'anky, Marse Will. You's berry t'oughtful. But so you allers was f'om a chile. I is tired. It's de trufe fo' my 'Vine Marster. See I aine so young as I used to was. No, Marse Will, I aine. Yo' moughtn't b'liebe me, but it do 'pear to me as I'm yeally gettin' oler an' oler ebery year ob my life—'specially since my po' ole man 'parted dis subluminary 'phere. I yeckon maybe he wants me up yonder. Well, if he do, ef my po' ole man do, he can hab me, soon's ebber my 'Vine Lord is willin'. 'Case now de ole madam's gone to glory, I aine got nuffin' to lib fo'. I aine for a fac'. It's de Lor's trufe," she concluded, as she slowly and humbly seated herself upon a low hassock.

"You wished to speak to me particularly when you came up, did you not, Martha?" kindly inquired the young man, to divert her from the gloom of her present thoughts.

"Yes, Marse Will. Co'se I did, else I wouldn' a 'sturbed yo'. Yo' 's gwine 'way 'morrow mornin', ain't yo'?"

"I expect to do so, Martha."

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"An' w'en yo' comin' back, Marse Will?" she questioned.

He paused. A shadow of darkest despair settled on his face. He turned his head that she might not see it.

When was he coming back?

"Never! Oh, never! Never again could he hope to return to the house of his forefathers, the home of his youth! Never even as a visitor!

He was going away to give himself up to justice—to accuse himself of a crime which, if it did not send him to an ignominious death, would doom him to penal servitude for life.

How should he reply to this poor, devoted creature?

"Martha, dear," he gently answered, "do not ask me. I cannot tell you."

"Well, Marse Will," she said, somewhat hurt by his refusal to confide in her, "it aine fo' de like ob me to pwy into de sacrets ob my parsers an' marsers—on'y, ef yo' aine comin' back yight soon, somefin' ought fo' to be done 'bout de ole madam's goods an' chattels."

"My mother's goods and chattels? My poor mother! She left nothing of value, nothing worth thinking about, Martha. Her treasures were laid up in heaven."

"Yes, dat's de trufe, Marse Will. But de ole madam lef' some 'hind her yere too, Marse Will, she did fo' a fac', de ole madam did."

"Some poor, pathetic, old sik and satin gowns. Take them, Martha, if you can use them. No one has so good a right to them as you, who were so loving and faithful a servant to your mistress."

"T'anky, Marse Will. But my mine wasn' yunnin' on silk nor likewise satin gowns, fo' dere was sumfin heap better'n dem, w'ich it wouldn' be p'oper fo' po' ole 'oman like me to wea'," said the woman, shaking her turbaned head.

"What were they, Martha? Her poor laces?"

"Lor', no, Marse Will! Dey wa'n't no good! Dey was like cobwebs. Ef yo' tech 'em dey'd tear. No,

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sah, I wasn' 'ludin' to laces, mo'n I were to gowns, w'ich w'at I were 'ludin' to were de ole madam's gran' Indy shole, w'ich I's f'ee to 'fess I nebber knowed de wally ob dat garment not till Mis' Wyn'op seen it an' tol' me, yes, sah."

"How was that, Martha? Where did Mrs. Wynthrop see it? My mother has not worn it since her widowhood."

"Way ob it were dis, Marse Will: Day 'fo' yes'day, w'en we-dem, me an' Mis' Wyn'op, bofe ob us togedder went an' open' de ole madam's big chiss, to get out some un'erclose fo'—but nebber mine w'at it were fo'!" exclaimed the woman, catching herself up suddenly. "Anyways, den an' dere I takes yout ob its sandywood box dat Indy shole, an' heave it, careless like, onto de back ob de cha'—'ca'se wot I care 'bout sholes on sich a 'casion?—an' it unrolled, it did, out'n its foles, it did, an' yippled all ober de cha' an' likewise de flo'. An' Mis' Wyn'op, w'en she see it, she drap eberyt'ing she had in her han', Mis' Wyn'op did, an' she des stood an' stared at dat shole.

"'Ah', ah,' she say, Mis' Wyn'op say, 'w'at a magdiffesent shole! W'ere did it come f'om?' An' I answer an' say:

"'Yes, ma'am, my ole marse w'at gone to glory, ole Marse Col. Ev'd Ha'co't, he brung it f'om foreign parts, and guv it to my ole mist'ess fo' a weddin' p'esent, w'en dey was b'ide an' g'oom, ma'am.' Den she say, Mis' Wyn'op say:

"'It's is a yeal wally de cash.' An' I answer an' say:

"'Yes, ma'am, I yeckon it is. I yeckon my ole marse did pay de wally in cash fo' dat shole. 'Ca'se he were a rich youn' man on his travels to foreign parts, w'en he bought it to bring home to his sweetheart.' An' den she look at me so queer, de madam did; an' des den Miss Marg'et, she come inter de yoom. An' Mis' Wyn'op say, she say:

"'Des look a-yere, Marg'et, yere's a Indy shole, de like ob w'ich I hab nebber seen 'fo', 'cept once, an' dat were on Queen Wicktorum's back, at de Askem

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yaces, w'en I was in Lunnun,' de madam say. 'It's a yeal wallydecash,' she say, w'atebber she did mean by wallydecash, fo' I yeckon I didn't understan' her fus' time. W'at is it, Marse Will, anyway?"

"Val-du-Cachemire—the finest quality of India shawl, usually reserved for royalty, and Indian royalty at that."

"But Miss Marg'et she sca'cely looked at de shole; but say—Miss Marg'et say:

"'Has yo' foun'——' Well, no matter w'at. But Miss Marg'et look so sollum, seems like de ole madam all ob a sudden yealized as dat wasn't no 'casion to be 'mirin' ob Indy sholes, nor likewise no oder finery, an' de glory ob dis worl' were wanity an' wexations, 'case she say—Miss Wyn'op say:

"'Fole it up careful, Marfy, an' put it 'way, an' gimmy them w'ite clo'se.' Which I did. An' now, Marse Will, w'at mus' I do 'long o' dat wallable wallycash?"

"Since it is so precious, I will beg Mrs. Wynthrop's acceptance of it as a keepsake; I will beg her to wear it for my dear mother's sake. That lady has made these last months of my mother's life happier than any time in the last five years—happier than anyone else could have made them. I wish I were able to show my gratitude to her in some still worthier way; but I think the precious shawl may not be quite unworthy of her acceptance."

"Hi! w'at yo' talkin' 'bout, Marse Will? De madam will be set up long ob it."

"I know it must be fresh and rich as ever, for I remember that my dear mother thought it too costly for her to wear. I never saw it on her shoulders but once. I remember my dear father used to laugh at her care of that shawl, and tell her that she might wear it every day of her life as a shawl, a carriage rug, a bed spread, a table cover, anything! and only needed to shake it out to have it as bright as ever—that Val-du-Cachemire never caught dirt, never faded and never wore out, and those qualities, as well as their richness and beauty and rarity, constituted their

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great value—that Arab chiefs rolled themselves in them to sleep in the sands of the desert. Bring the shawl to my room to-morrow morning before I go down."

"All yight, Marse Will," said Martha; but she still lingered.

"Is that all?" inquired Harcourt.

"Dat's all de 'fects w'at's in de house, Marse Will."

"Well, there's nothing out of the house, is there?"

"Oh, young marse, yo' fo'gets de burried silber."

Harcourt started.

He had not once thought of the silver since the day on which Martha told him of it. He had been too deeply absorbed in the dark tragedy of his life.

"I do not know to whom the treasure justly belongs. I only know that it does not belong to me."

"Well, den, w'at yo' gwine do 'bout it, Marse Will?"

"I shall tell Mr. Wynthrop of it to-morrow before I go."

"Oh, Marse Will! An' e'spose my po' ole dead an' gone ole angel, w'at t'ought as he were doin' de bes' fo' de ole mist'ess' sake," said Martha, sorrowfully.

"No; I need not mention the name of Moses in connection with the matter. Nor, even if I should, would a just man like Mr. Wynthrop judge him harshly."

"It broke my po' ole angel's heart, it did. W'at wiv his 'votion to de ole mist'ess, 'mittin' sin, to 'vide her wid tea, an' toddy, an' sich, w'ich I's t'ankful dis p'ecious night as she nebber wanted fo' neider and wot wiv habin' it on his tender con's'ence, it killed my po' ole man, it did. But doane yo' go an' e'spose my po' ole 'parted serryfim to no strangers, Marse Will. Doane yo', now."

"Indeed, I will not, though, if I should, Mr. Wynthrop would only look on the act as one of devoted but mistaken loyalty."

"Dat's all yight, then, sah. An' now, ef yo's got no mo' 'mands fo' me, I woane stay yere keepin' yo' up no longer. Good-night, Marse Will."

"Good-night, dear, good Martha."

She dropped a courtesy and left the room.

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Harcourt went to bed and tried to sleep, but failed, and lay awake, meditating and sometimes praying until after midnight.

Toward dawn he fell into a fitful slumber, from which he was at last awakened by the rapping of Martha at his door.

"Well, come in; the door is not locked," he said.

The woman came in, bringing a sandalwood box, which contained the shawl and filled the room with its fine aroma.

She set the box on a stand, opened it, took out the shawl and spread it all over the bed, like a rich and priceless counterpane, so that the young man could see it to the best advantage. It was a dark, superb wrap, in all its pristine glory.

"Poor, dear mother! She never wore it half a dozen times in her life. She meant to have left it as an heirloom to the daughters who were to follow her down the generations—the daughters who all went before her to their everlasting homes," murmured Harcourt, with a deep sigh, as he thought of his four sisters and their early death.

"Dem angels is all cloved in w'ite yayment now, an' doane wan' no filfy yags ob yethly wanities," said Martha, solemnly.

"Fold it up, Martha, and put it back in the box."

The woman obeyed.

"Now leave it on the table."

"Yes, sah. An' now, Marse Will, I yeckon it's mos' time fo' yo' to yise, as de fam'ly is all down in the settin' yoom, an' I yeckon dey is waitin' breakfas' fo' yo'; so I'll des go an' fetch yo' hot water," said the woman, as she left the room.

She soon returned with the pitcher of hot water, set it just inside the door and then retreated.

Harcourt arose and dressed, and went down to the sitting room, where he found all the family assembled.

All greeted him warmly; and then Mrs. Wynthrop arose and said:

"The morning is so warm, and the air so delicious,

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that I have had the breakfast table set out under the great oak tree I thought it would be pleasant."

Everyone declared that it would be simply delightful, as they arose and followed her out to the lawn.

It was a lively party that gathered around the breakfast table under the spreading branches of the patriarchal oak.

If anything could have raised the spirits of poor Harcourt, that scene must have done so. But ah! "the cloud and the tempest near" overshadowed and oppressed him.

After breakfast, when they re-entered the house, Harcourt asked Mr. Wynthrop for a short interview.

The elder man led the way to the little outside office, where he transacted business with his farm people; that is, where he kept his accounts and paid their wages.

As soon as they were seated, Harcourt told Mr. Wynthrop of the silver that had been buried on the Lone Lodge estate by a devoted servant of the family without the knowledge of Mrs. Harcourt, and confessed to that lady by the man on his deathbed.

Mr. Wynthrop was not so much surprised by the news as Harcourt had expected him to be.

He said that he had been told of several instances of treasures buried during the war.

"But, sir, I want the benefit of your advice as to the course to be taken to restore this property to its rightful owner," said the young man.

"Who do you suppose to be the rightful owner?" inquired the elder.

"I thought that perhaps you might be."

"Oh, no; I bought the whole estate—land, stock, buildings and furniture, but there was no silverware in the inventory of the latter."

"Then it must rightfully belong to my father's chief creditor, the holder of the mortgage on the estate. It was just before the mortgage was foreclosed that the poor, ignorant negro, whose religion was a fanatical worship of his mistress, secreted the silver as a future provision for the impoverished lady, but, as

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I said before, without her knowledge. I was a schoolboy at the beginning of the financial trouble, and knew nothing whatever of the mortgage on our manor, or the holder of it. I was older and at college when the mortgage was foreclosed and the sale ordered. I knew nothing of the general break-up and loss of our home for months after it had occurred."

"That was strange."

"It was before I was nineteen years of age when the crash came. But you see my dear mother, from mistaken tenderness, kept me in utter ignorance of the situation."

"But why?"

"I think she feared that if I should become acquainted with the real state of affairs, I would leave college, and go to work to earn money, as I certainly should have done, Mr. Wynthrop."

"And you would have been right, my young friend."

"She knew that, and kept the knowledge of our extreme poverty from me. I was her youngest, and her all. She had great ambition for me, and she inspired me with aspirations to fulfill her ambition. She wished me to study law, and to distinguish myself in that profession, and to rise to—Heaven only knows to what pinnacle of earthly fame!" said Harcourt, with a sad smile.

"It has been said that every mother has a latent faith and hope that her favorite son may become President of the United States," said Mr. Wynthrop.

"Well, I have told you the reason why it was that I knew nothing of the impending ruin for months after the final crash came. My mother was my only correspondent, wrote to me as usual every week, and had her letters posted, as usual, at Logwood. I had no suspicion that these letters were written from the log cabin in the hollow, instead of from Lone Lodge on the hill, nor did any word in them hint the fact—no suspicion at all, and no knowledge of the ruin until I came home at the end of the college term of that year, and found the widow of Everard Harcourt living in a log hut. So you see, though I wish to restore

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this secreted silver to its rightful owner, I do not even know the name of my father's chief creditor. You, who purchased the estate, may be able to tell me."

"Oh, yes, I can do that. Charles Cutts, broker, Federal Street, Baltimore.

Harcourt had started and changed color at first hearing the name of the man already so deeply mixed up in the tragedy of his life.

"Is that all I can do for you, my young friend?" inquired Mr. Wynthrop.

"That is all. Thank you very much," said Harcourt.

"I wish we could prevail on you to remain with us a few days longer. I hate to have you leave us when you are looking so far from well," said Mr. Wynthrop, kindly.

"You are very good, and I am deeply grateful. I should be too glad to avail myself of your invitation, but a sacred duty calls me away."

"Well, if you must go, order the buggy for the train you travel in. Silas or Margaret will drive you. One or the other of the two goes to the post office every day. Their time to-day may be arranged to suit you."

"Thank you very much. I would like to go by the next train, if convenient."

"That is the ten-thirty. You will have to leave here within an hour. That will exactly suit us also," said Mr. Wynthrop. And then both men rose at once to leave the office.

Mr. Wynthrop walked around to the stable to order the buggy.

Harcourt re-entered the house and went up to his room with the intention of taking the sandalwood box containing the Val-du-Cachemire and presenting it to Mrs. Wynthrop.

But when he was about to do so a certain shyness came over him, a feeling of delicacy restrained him from making this offering in person. So he put down the box and went to his table and sat down and wrote a grateful, affectionate letter to the lady, warmly,

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thanking her for her exceeding kindness, and begging her to accept his offering as a memorial of the departed friend whose last days on earth she had made so happy and comfortable.

He laid the letter on the top of the box and set a paperweight on it to keep it there.

Then he packed his valise, and taking it in his hand, with his duster thrown over his arm, he left the room.

In the hall below he met every member of the family, including Martha, waiting to bid him good-by.

Margaret Wynthrop was there, dressed for the drive.

"You see, Mr. Harcourt, I am always elected by the family republic to be your Jehu," she said.

"Permit me to be yours, Miss Wynthrop," he answered.

"Plainly, I am going after tape and buttons. If it were only after the family letters, Silas might go; but we could not trust him with the important matter of tape and buttons," Margaret said.

Harcourt took leave of all the family, repeating, reiterating his thanks, then went out with Miss Wynthrop, handed her into the buggy, took the reins and started.

The horse was fresh and went off at a good pace.

Less than an hour's pleasant drive along the country road, up wooded hills and down into fertile vales rich in fields and orchards, brought them to the Logwood railway station.

The train was just coming up.

Harcourt had only time to bid a hasty but warm and grateful good-by to Margaret Wynthrop, spring from the buggy, run to the ticket office, secure his ticket and jump on board the train just as it started again on its eastern flight.

He was on his way to give himself up to justice to atone for his part in the death of Nathan Yelverton. He was henceforth dead to the world—dead to love, dead to ambition, dead to hope. The future held

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nothing for him but suffering, humiliation and endurance.

Yet it is always darkest just before day.

CHAPTER IV

THE WAY OF THE CROSS

YES, Harcourt's life was dead—dead to love, ambition, hope; alive only to suffering, humiliation, endurance.

Such were his thoughts, feelings and convictions as he sat on the left-hand back corner of a crowded car, rushing on toward his self-sentenced doom.

In his numb despair, which was something like lethargy, time, space, events passed by unheeded.

This was the way train, and stopped at every station. Passengers got out, and other ones got in, while he remained scarcely conscious of the bustling changes.

In due time a man came on from the restaurant car to take orders for dinner, and in course of his round, spoke to the silent, abstracted passenger in the corner, asking him if he would give an order for some refreshment.

Harcourt had no appetite, but was consumed by thirst as well as exhausted by mental and physical weariness. He asked for a cup of coffee only, which was soon brought to him.

He drank it eagerly, and after that, when the train started again, he relapsed into the old dreary apathy, during which all the rushing life around him passed without observation.

Day waned. Night lowered.

The porter came in to light the lamps. When he had finished the task and left the car, many of the passengers settled themselves comfortably in their seats to doze, for this was not a "sleeper."

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It was after midnight when the train reached Baltimore.

Harcourt got out here, for he wished to see Charles Cutts, before going on to Washington. He went to a cheap public house near the depot, and took a room for the night. But no food passed his lips in the eating room, no sleep sealed his eyes in the bedchamber.

After his troubled night he arose early in the morning, and forced himself in the interests of conscience to take a little breakfast.

Then he went out and walked to Federal Street, and paced up and down the sidewalk until the hour came when he could present himself at the broker's office.

At length, when he heard the Catholic Church bells toll the hour of ten, he went straight to the broker's office, and entered the open door.

He was immediately confronted with Charles Cutts, who had apparently just risen from his seat, and was standing, while saying a few last words to a departing visitor.

He started and changed color at the sight of Harcourt, and returned his bow with a short nod.

Then, as his visitor said "Good-morning" and left the office, Cutts turned to Harcourt and said:

"Well, sir? What can I do for you?"

"Give me a few minutes' private conversation, if convenient," Harcourt replied.

"Certainly," said Cutts, with visible uneasiness, which somewhat surprised the young man. "Private, did you say?"

"If you please."

"Then come in here," said the broker, leading the way to a rear room. In there was only one clerk seated at a desk.

"Leave us, Watts! I have some private business to transact with this gentleman," said the broker who had lost some of his self-possession, or he would not have spoken so many words to his employee.

The clerk vanished, and Cutts dropped into his

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leathern armchair, pointed with a shaking hand to another, and said, with a shaking voice also:

"Sit down! And now, in the name of Heaven, what is it you want of me?"

Surprised at the seemingly causeless agitation of the man, that was as excessive as it was incomprehensible, Harcourt replied:

"It is nothing that should disturb you in the least, Mr. Cutts. It is not anything that I want of you, but something that I wish to restore to you."

"Oh, I——" said Cutts, putting his hand to his head—"I have not been well. I—I did not understand. What is it, then?"

"It is only an affair of silver plate, included among the goods and chattels of Lone Lodge Estate on which you held and foreclosed a mortgage. At the time of the sale the silver plate was missing. It has been lately found. And it must be restored to you."

"Silver plate?" inquired the broker, passing his hand to and fro across his forehead, with a puzzled yet relieved air—"I know nothing about silver plate belonging to the Lone Lodge Estate."

"When the mortgage was foreclosed and the estate was sold the plate could not be found. Do you not remember?"

"No, I was not on the spot; my agent was. I know nothing about any silver plate," persisted Cutts, growing every moment more at his ease.

"The plate was taken away and secreted by a poor, faithful but misguided negro, without—I need scarcely add—the knowledge of any member of our family."

"Oh, that goes without saying!" politely and quite sincerely interposed Cutts.

"As this silver plate has been found, it must be restored to you as the holder of the mortgage under which the estate was sold," said Harcourt.

"I tell you, sir, I know nothing about it! And, moreover, I tell you that I am quite sure there was no silver plate included in the inventory of the furniture of Lone Lodge," the broker insisted.

Harcourt looked incredulous and shook his head.

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Cutts arose and went to a tall secretary on the other side of the room, opened a drawer, took out a folded parchment, brought it to Harcourt, and said:

"I will soon convince you that I am right. Here is a complete and certified inventory of all the furniture, fixtures, goods and chattels of Lone Lodge on which I took a mortgage. Examine for yourself."

Harcourt took the document and examined it carefully.

At the end of his perusal he handed the parchment back to the broker and said:

"You are right and I was wrong. I am satisfied and puzzled! I do not understand this case in the least."

"But I do," said the broker. "It is clear enough to me. The negro stole the plate before that inventory was made, or the mortgage taken."

"The poor, faithful creature never stole, or dreamed of stealing, from his mistress. He would have laid down his life for her. He knew that families living on isolated farms, likely to be raided by soldiers during the war, often buried money and plate to secure them. He believed that the silver belonged to his mistress and was in danger of being taken from her. He secreted it, probably, somewhere in the house or cellar before the inventory was taken or the mortgage given, as you suggest, but he never buried it until the night before the sale. He secreted and buried it as a provision for the impoverished future of his aged mistress. I have reason to know, however, that later some suspicion of his wrongdoing in this matter dawned on his mind, and troubled his conscience before he died."

"Well, he secreted the silver from his mistress and for his mistress, and really wronged no one, so far as I can see," concluded the broker.

"I am very glad to know it," said Harcourt.

At that moment there came a modest rap at the door.

Cutts stepped to it and opened it and took a card, looked at it, and said:

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"Ask the gentleman please to walk in."

"You will excuse me, sir; I have an important appointment for this hour. If you are staying in the city and have no other engagement, come and dine with me this evening. Seven, sharp. Here is my address.

He put his card in Harcourt's hand.

"I thank you, but I must leave by the next train for Washington," the young man replied, taking his hat and rising.

"And you will only catch it on the fly, if you catch it at all," said the broker.

"In that case, good-morning, sir," Harcourt exclaimed, hurrying from the room. He passed Cutts' new visitor, who was coming in.

He hastened to the house where he had spent the night, paid his bill, snatched up his valise, ran to the depot, got his ticket, and jumped on board the train a second before it moved.

Not until he was settled in his seat and on his way to Washington, as fast as steam could carry him, did he have time to think upon the strange effect his sudden appearance in the broker's office that morning had upon Charles Cutts. But thinking suggested nothing to explain the matter. He could make nothing of the mystery. There was another unusual circumstance in their interview of that morning. The broker's omission to refer in any manner to the tragedy of the Isle of Storms.

On no previous occasion since that tragedy had Harcourt met Charles Cutts without the latter referring immediately to that tragedy, and torturing the soul of Harcourt with mysterious hints of knowing more about the facts than anyone else in the world, except the man to whom he spoke. But on this morning Cutts had never once alluded to the horror.

Why had he not done so? And why did he seem so much agitated at the sight of Harcourt?

The young man was still turning these questions over in his mind when the train reached Washington.

As a matter of convenience, he had determined to

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go down to the south of Maryland by the railroad rather than by the river.

He would have had to wait until the next morning for a boat. He would only have to wait two hours for a train.

He determined to utilize these two hours by going to see Lawyer Merritt, and finding out what disposition had been made of his sometime protégé, little Owlet, the quaint child whom he had rescued from the streets of New York and delivered into the charge of Roma Fronde's attorney.

He left his valise at the depot, and walked from there to Louisiana Avenue, and went to Mr. Merritt's office.

On sending in his card he was at once admitted.

Though the lawyer knew of the young man's recent loss, and needed not the badge of mourning around his hat to tell the news, yet he was shocked to see the unutterable woe and despair on his face; woe and despair that did not seem to be explainable by any bereavement, however grievous.

He arose and came forward with outstretched hand to meet the visitor, saying:

"The newspapers have informed me of your sad loss, Mr. Harcourt. I very deeply and sincerely sympathize with your sorrow. 'One event happeneth to all.' Old a man as I am, it has not been many years since I closed the eyes of my own aged mother. She was the only living relative that I had. So, you see, I can enter into your feelings," he said, as he pressed the young man's hand.

"Thank you, Mr. Merritt," said Harcourt, in a broken voice.

"Here, take this. Sit down," said the lawyer, wheeling forward his own large resting-chair.

Harcourt bowed and sank wearily into the seat, betraying in every look and motion the deep depression of mental and physical forces under which he suffered. Mr. Merritt saw his condition, and went to a little buffet, from which he brought a glass of rich old port and offered it to his visitor.

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"Thank you, sir; but pray excuse me; I am a total abstinence man," said Harcourt.

"What nonsense! If you were ten thousand total abstinence men rolled into one, you must take this wine. You are fairly sinking for want of a stimulant. Here, drink it, man."

"I pray you, excuse me. I must not, indeed."

"What! Not as a medicine?"

"No, not even as a medicine."

"Why, what do you mean?" inquired the lawyer, setting down the glass on the top of his desk.

"Since one fatal night in my life, I have registered a vow never—under any circumstances whatever—never to taste alcoholic stimulants in any form."

The lawyer looked at the young man wistfully, mentally connecting the meaning of his words with the mystery of Roma Fronde's disastrous wedding day, and wondering whether there was really any relation of the first to the last; but as Harcourt said nothing more on the subject, he forbore to ask a question.

"I came here this morning, Mr. Merritt, only to inquire about my little protégé, Owlet. Is she with Miss Fronde?" Harcourt questioned.

"She is. They are together at the Isle of Storms, where the lady is engaged in the humane enterprise of turning the house and the isle into a sanitarium—a free sanitarium—for destitute invalids and children."

"An angel's work, indeed," said Harcourt, with a sigh.

"Yes, her life and fortune will be henceforth devoted to such works. She has established a free school for the education of colored people on her estate at Goblin Hall."

"A noble life is hers. Truly a life worth living."

"Yes. Compared with her aims, how small, low and poor seem all merely selfish ambitions for wealth, rank, fame or power."

"I hope she was glad to recover her protégé."

"Glad! I should say so. The meeting was some-

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thing of a circus, though Miss Catherine was the only performer, and I comprised the whole audience. Miss Fronde was serenely, imperially happy, after her manner."

Harcourt sighed deeply.

"Yes," he thought, "with her good works and with her adopted child, her life would be full of occupation, interest, satisfaction. She would not even think of him when he should be in his prison cell, working out the expiation of his sin."

Then he mentally took himself to task for thus sighing over her good, useful, wise life.

"It is well she should forget me, well she should be happy in her philanthropic work. I am an envious wretch not to rejoice over it," he concluded.

"Well! Good-afternoon, Mr. Merritt. I only called to make these inquiries," said the young man, rising.

"Are you staying in the city, Harcourt?" inquired the lawyer.

"No, I leave within the hour."

He did not specify the direction of his journey, nor did the lawyer make any further inquiry.

They shook hands and parted.

"Crazy as a loon, poor fellow!" said the latter, as he turned again to his work. "Melancholy mad, without a doubt. This comes of inordinate ambition and overwhelming work. He has never fully recovered from the effects of that brain fever, which was the result of an overtasked mind and an underfed body, and which would have been much more merciful had it killed him outright instead of blighting his life by leaving him the living wreck that he is. Poor fellow! Poor fellow!"

Meanwhile Harcourt walked back to the depot and reached it in time to secure his train.

Again he chose a corner seat at the left-hand side of the back of the car, a seat that he had all to himself, and he was thankful that no one came to sit beside him.

During all that long afternoon's ride through the heavy forests and fertile fields of Maryland he sat

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so apart from his fellow passengers, buried in deep, despairing thought.

The sun declined to its setting. The porter came through the cars and lighted all the lamps. The afternoon faded into evening, the evening darkened into night.

Several hours of darkness passed. It was nearer dawn than midnight when the train stopped at Snowden Station, which, it will be remembered, was some little distance from Snowden proper.

Harcourt got off the train, taking his valise with him, and set out to walk to the village. The old, gibbous moon was shining in the east, and countless stars were twinkling in the clear, blue-black sky.

Harcourt took the direct road leading due east into the main street of the village and through it out again to the road going down to the water side. On this street Harrison's Hotel was standing.

But now, under the moonlit and starlit sky, at three o'clock on this May morning, the village was as silent as a City of the Dead.

"Not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse."

The streets were deserted, the houses closed and dark.

Harcourt walked on between the tomblike houses until he came to Harrison's, which he found also shut, dark, still.

He was too considerate of others' comfort to knock any of the people up at this hour.

And besides this, faint and weary as he was, he did not feel disposed for either food or sleep.

He continued his way along the village street until it gradually merged into the sandy road that led down to the water side.

CHAPTER V

HARCOURT HAUNTS THE ISLE OF STORMS

The beach was as lonely as the streets. Not a living creature was to be seen. Several boats were

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drawn up on the sands and left there. Out from the shore rolled the dark waters of the bay till the line was lost under the eastern horizon, above which the old moon was shining very brilliantly for an old moon. Half a mile toward the northeast lay the Isle of Storms, always like some monstrous antediluvian sea serpent floating on the surface of the water.

Harcourt fixed his eyes on this isle.

How many terrible associations were connected with it! What awful memory the sight of it would have awakened, had that memory ever slept! But now Roma was there, about her angel's work—Roma, his beloved, his adored, his queen, his goddess, the peerless one, who had crowned his young life with her love before he had fallen into the abyss of sin, and sullied and lost himself and his crown.

"That way madness lies!"

Ah! what would he not give to gaze once more upon that beloved, that worshiped face! If he could but do so unknown and unsuspected; or even if he could but stand under her walls and gaze at the window of the room that held her to-night! If he could but kneel and kiss the floor of the porch her feet had passed over! If he could bring a leaf from the twining rose vine that shaded the entrance to press to his heart and lips, even that would be as balm to the bruised bosom.

A great longing to go to the isle took possession of him. Why should he not go once more, and for the last time, to tread the ground she walked on, to be near her for a little while, unseen, unthought of? It was now near day, and she was an early riser. He might even, by careful watching, get a glimpse of her angel face. That would be something to carry away with him through the fiery ordeal of his criminal trial, and to the goal of despair—the prison cell.

He would go to the isle.

To think was to resolve and to act.

There were several small boats moored within his reach. He might borrow one with a pair of oars,

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row out to the isle, and spend an hour there, then row back and reach the mainland before the owner could possibly want the boat, or the boat itself could be missed. He could pay the owner for the use of it just the same as if he had hired it in the regular way.

He stepped down to where the smallest of the row-boats was secured. He unfastened it, and pushed it off upon the water, threw in his valise, jumped in, took up the pair of oars and began to row toward the Isle of Storms. The boat was small and light, the tide was ebbing softly out, and the water was smooth. All these circumstances were in his favor. The sky was clear, blue-black, and darkly brilliant with the splendor of innumerable stars overhead; and off before him, toward the eastern horizon, it was silvered over with the soft light of the gibbous moon. About half a mile before him lay the undulating line of the Isle of Storms.

Every external circumstance was in his favor, yet exhausted as he himself was from want of rest and want of food, neither of which the mental pressure of anguish and despair would permit him to take, he could not make much headway with his oars.

Often he was obliged to stop rowing and allow his boat to drift, even out of its course.

Thus it happened that he was more than half an hour making the distance between Snowden and the isle.

As he drew nearer and nearer to the place on which his life had been wrecked, awful associations swarmed about him, darkening and oppressing his spirits.

His eyes, now adjusted to the luminous obscurity of starlit sky and open sea, saw every detail of the scene before him.

Low on the East Sand he saw the fishermen laying out their seines to sea.

It was indeed a mercy for him that the aspect of the place was so much changed from what it had been when he first knew it. The fatal annex, in which the tragedy of Nathan Yelverton's death, on September

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15th of the last year, had been enacted, was gone, together with all the other temporary hotel buildings which had been added since the tenantry of Thomas Todd. Nothing remained but the ancient manor house and its old outbuildings.

Old Guyon Hall seemed all shut up and darkened. In all the huge, dark isle no light gleamed. But as he gazed one window on the second floor front, near the left-hand central hall, was suddenly illumined.

He had by this time reached the sands. He got out of his boat, leaving his valise in it, drew it up on the sands, threw his oars into it, and set off to climb the side of the crest.

When he reached the plateau before the front of the house he stood still and gazed up at that illumined window. Its shutters were wide open, its curtains evidently drawn back, but a thin, gauzelike white shade from top to bottom softened the bright light, and prevented any too inquisitive spy from seeing into the room.

"It must be hers," he said to himself. "It must be Roma's. That room, if I remember rightly, was the finest bedchamber in the house. And who should occupy it now but the young mistress of the house, since she has no one with her but two orphan children and her colored servants? Yes! that is Roma Fronde's sacred chamber! That is the shrine of my goddess! I will worship her from this obscurity! Oh, if she would but come to the window for a moment! She must have just risen for the day. She was always such an early riser! She loved to be awake and up to watch, as she said, the daily triumph of light over darkness in the coming of the sun. And the sun must be coming soon now!"

He turned to the east and looked.

Yes! the horizon was faintly flushed, and the water which met it reflected the delicate glow.

He withdrew a pace, and sat down on a bowlder, in a clump of wild shrubbery, nearly opposite the lighted window, but in which he was completely hidden, and

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from which he could gaze, unseen, upon the shrine of his idol.

"Oh, if she would but come to the window, so that I might, unknown, look upon her form once more before I go down into the abyss forever! Once more! even though from behind a veil!" he moaned, still gazing on the lighted window.

Presently—oh, joy!—a shadow appeared at the window—a superb woman's form, gracefully draped, and clearly outlined against the semi-transparent window shade.

He crept, still under the shrubbery, nearer to the house, lifted his head, and gazed up at the vision.

Yes, it was the beautiful figure of Roma Fronde—seen behind the veil of the thin, white muslin shade—but unmistakably hers!

He rose upon his knee, clasped his hands and lifted his eyes, as if in worship of the veiled image of his goddess. And so he remained as long as the vision lingered at the window.

This was only for a few moments.

She passed away and did not return.

He waited and waited in the hope of seeing her again, but in vain.

Presently the light went out, and nothing could be seen but the plain white surface of the shade.

The morning was growing brighter. The rosy flush in the east was rising higher up in the sky, and spreading further out on the water. The sun would soon rise.

"It is time for me to go now, or the owner of this boat will be looking for it, and not finding it, will think it has been stolen," he said to himself.

A pang gripped his heart, and for a moment stopped his breath as if it would have taken his life. Once more he raised his eyes to the veiled window of Roma's sacred room.

"Farewell, beloved!" he moaned. "Farewell forever! If I dared pray for you—if a sinner might pray for a saint, I should invoke every blessing of

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Heaven upon your sacred head! Farewell, beloved! Farewell forever."

He turned away and went slowly down the cliff, turning again many times to look back, moaning farewells.

He reached the sands, pushed off the boat, stepped into it and took his oars.

Still, as he rowed away from the isle, he looked back many times, murmuring:

"Farewell, beloved! Farewell forever! Never on this side the River of Death shall we two meet again."

As he looked back, he saw the fishermen on the west shore of the isle preparing to haul the seines which he had seen them lay out before day.

He sighed to think how evil, useless, and wretched had his own existence become, in comparison with their good, useful and happy lives!

He was naturally even more exhausted now than he had been in the early hours of the morning. His progress over the water was very slow. Often he had to rest on his oars and let the boat drift, again some way out of its course, so that it was nearly an hour, and the sun was rising and blazing a path of fire from east to west across the water before he reached the land.

A small crowd of men and boys was gathered on the beach. They set up a shout as he approached. The burden of it was:

"There it is now! That's the boat!"

Harcourt pushed up the boat and stepped ashore, valise in hand.

"So it was you, young Mr. Harcourt! Hanged if we all didn't think Tommy's boat was stolen! Glad to see you, sir!" said Pete Simmons, a popular boatman of Snowden.

"Thank you, Simmons. Who owns the boat?"

"My son, Tommy, there," said the boatman, pointing to a lad of about twelve years of age, who stood at some distance rubbing the cuffs of his jacket into his eyes.

"Come here, my lad," said Harcourt, beckoning him.

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Tommy approached, sandy-haired, sunburned, freckle-faced, and looking very much ashamed of unmanly traces of tears on his cheeks.

"I am very sorry to have caused you any distress by borrowing your boat," said Harcourt, taking out his pocketbook.

"Was afeared 'at some nigger had gone and stole it, and I should never get it back no more," replied the boy.

"Will this pay you for the use of your boat?" inquired the yong man, as he selected a two-dollar greenback and put it into the hands of the lad, whose countenance immediately cleared and broke into smiles as he pocketed the money and bobbed his thanks.

"What! You charge the gentleman for a little trip in your boat just across to the island and back, 'specially when you didn't go yourself and he had to do all the rowing? Fie on you!" said Pete Simmons.

The boy's face fell; but he made no offer to restore the money.

"Good-morning," said Harcourt, moving away.

"Here! you, sir! Stop, please!" cried the boatman, following the young man.

Harcourt turned.

"You give that little cuss two dollars, when you oughtn't to give him more'n fifty cents at the most, if you give him anything. That's the regular price for a boat to the island and back ag'in. I owe you a dollar and a half, sir. And you'll take it unless you mean to affront me by the offer of alms."

"I beg your pardon," said Harcourt. "I really did not know the rates at which boats are hired here, or, if I ever did, I had forgotten."

He took the change—for as Simmons put the case he could not do otherwise—and with a nod of adieu, continued on his way, leaving Tommy growling over "dad's freshness" in interfering, by which he lost just three quarters of his whole two-dollar note.

Harcourt walked along the sandy road until it

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merged into the village street, and still on until he reached Harrison's.

The household was all up and astir by this time.

Harcourt walked into the broad middle hall on the left side of which the little office was railed off. At a desk behind a counter within the rails old Harrison himself was on duty—the same tall, gaunt, swarthy figure, with the same straggling, iron-gray hair and beard, and dressed in the same country-made clothes as when Harcourt had seen him last.

"How do you do, Mr. Harrison?" said the young man, presenting himself at the rails.

"Ah! how do you do, Mr. Harcourt? Glad to see you, sir!" he exclaimed, rising to shake hands with the newcomer. "Just come in by the morning train, I reckon?"

"I reached here by the midnight train, which was much behind time, so that I found the village dead and buried, as it were, in sleep, at least."

"Why, what on earth did you do with yourself at that hour? You didn't come here!" said the landlord, half inquisitively, half reproachfully.

"I did come here, but finding the house closed and dark, I forbore to disturb anyone and walked on down to the beach. As the night was very fine, I took a boat and rowed to the Isle of Storms to take a look at the old place and come back," Harcourt replied, but he did not deem it necessary to tell of his vigil under the lighted window, or the vision he had seen there.

"Ah! yes; great doings going on on the island, since the young heiress has come into possession. Turning everything upside down and topsy-turvy there! And the old Guyon homestead into a sanctiflorium, or something of the sort! Making old California Guyon's funds fly, I tell you! That comes of leaving lots of money to women! I never did approve of trusting women with money. They don't know what to do with it. Pity she hasn't got a husband to manage her and her money, too!" said Harrison, whose gossip-

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ing propensities often seriously interfered with his business interests.

"Can I have a room and breakfast here?" inquired Harcourt, as much for the purpose of putting an end to the old man's chatter as of procuring the refreshments of which he stood so much in need.

"Oh, certainly! Certainly! Excuse me! Certainly!" exclaimed Harrison, roused to a sudden sense of his responsibilities—"Bill!"

The coal-black negro boy, whom we have seen before, came from shadowy regions in the rear, in answer to his master's call.

"Take this gentleman's valise and show him upstairs to the large front room, first floor, right hand," said the landlord; for be it known that in these small, old-fashioned country inns the rooms were not numbered "like cells in a jail," as old Harrison was accustomed to say, in contemptuous allusion to the custom of the fashionable Crest House.

Bill took up the valise, turned and ducked his head to "the gentleman" by way of obeisance and invitation, and led the way up the broad stairs to the floor above, and to the pleasant front room assigned to the guest.

He supplied the young man with plenty of fresh spring water and clean towels, took his boots to give them a shine, and left the room.

Harcourt took as good a bath as circumstances admitted, and dressed himself neatly for the ordeal of the day. Decent people, under all circumstances, care for the cleanliness of their persons.

By the time he had got through this, Bill reappeared with his boots, and with the information that:

"B'eakfas' is yeady, ef yo' p'ease, sah."

Harcourt followed the boy downstairs to a pleasant corner rear room, whose four windows, two east, two north, were draped on the inside with white muslin curtains, and shaded on the outside with trailing wistaria, laburnum, honeysuckles and roses.

A table was spread with snow-white damask, adorned with fine white china, and laden with such

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rural dainties as home-made bread, freshly churned butter, newly skimmed cream, new-laid eggs, and nicely broiled spring chickens, to say nothing of pure, honest coffee, strong and aromatic.

Old Harrison had his faults, but he was not up to the adulteration of food, nor to the "dodge" of sending all his fresh produce to market in the cities, and buying the refuse of those markets for his family and guests, making cent per cent by the operation! So it goes without telling that old Harrison never did and never will make a fortune.

Harcourt sat down to the table and Bill stood by to wait on him.

But appetite was gone, with every other faculty for enjoyment.

In a perfunctory way, he drank a cup of coffee and forced himself to swallow a few mouthfuls of solid food.

Any friend of Will Harcourt who had seen him then might have wished for his speedy death as the best thing that could come to him.

He spent but a very few minutes at the breakfast table, and then he arose and went to the office, where old Harrison was still on duty—that is, waiting for some chance customer or idler to come in and take a drink, or at least have a chat with him.

"Can you direct me to the nearest magistrate's office?" inquired Harcourt.

"Yes, of course I can. But what's the matter? What do you want with a magistrate?" inquired old Harrison, all agog for a gossip. Then rising and leaning forward, with his elbows resting on the counter, and lowering his voice to a whisper, he inquired:

"Have you been robbed?"

"No," replied Harcourt, with a bitter smile, "I have not, to my own knowledge, been robbed, nor is it to make a complaint against anyone that I wish to go before a magistrate."

"Then what on earth is it that you do want to go for?" inquired the old gossip, who had no delicate

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scruples in asking questions on any subject, under any circumstances.

"It is a matter of private business for the present. Later you will know all about it," replied the young man.

Old Harrison stared at him with eyes so fixed in a manner that must have seemed very rude if it had been involuntary.

"Will you now be so kind as to give me the information I have asked for?" inquired Harcourt.

"Oh!" exclaimed the old man, shaking himself out of his trance of wonder. "Tell you where you can find a magistrate? Certainly. There is Squire Levi Kilgour, of Hunter's Hold, you know."

"I know him; but I did not know he was a justice of the peace."

"Oh, yes, since last Jannywerry. And his office is in Calvert Street, about ten minutes' walk from here."

"Thank you," said Harcourt, with a bow, as he turned away.

"Summat's up!" said the landlord. "Summat's up, sure!"

CHAPTER VI

HARCOURT GIVES HIMSELF UP

HARCOURT walked out of the house and down the street in the direction of the magistrate's office. He acted in a dazed, mechanical manner, scarcely conscious of the imminency of the awful doom he was about to invoke upon himself, scarcely knowing that he was leaving ease, liberty, good repute, behind him forever, to take up the cross of a convict's life of slavery, shame, suffering.

The strain on heart, brain, nerves, had been too long, tense, grievous. Mental as well as physical powers had given way, in a degree.

He turned the corner of Main Street into Calvert,

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and walked on, staring at the signs of the few shops he passed, with only a vague perception of their meaning, until he came to a two-story red brick house, the front door of which stood between two windows, and bore the sign of——

LEVI KILGOUR,
Justice of the Peace.

He entered the front, and found himself in a narrow pass, with a door on each side. The one on the right hand bore the same sign as the one on the street.

He opened that and entered the office.

"Thirty days. Take him away, constable, and clear the office," were the first words Harcourt heard, as he stood in the middle of a scene that seemed to be slowly turning around with him.

For a moment a strange feeling of dizziness, blindness and loss of personal identity overcame him, so that he could neither see his surroundings nor realize his position.

He was dimly conscious that a crowd of people left the place.

Then, as his brain cleared, he looked around him.

He found himself in a rough and poorly furnished room, whose bare floor of pine planks bore the marks of many muddy boots from wet country roads; whose unshaded windows were stained and dusty; whose whitewashed walls were specked and moldy. The only furniture consisted of a wooden bench, that ran around three sides of the room, and a large oak table, with drawers, inclosed in a rail, and behind which sat Levi Kilgour, the magistrate, a large, portly man, with a full face, clear blue eyes, and silvery white hair and beard, clothed in a business suit of brown tweed. At the end of the same table, on a stool, sat the clerk, a slim, pale-faced, red-haired young fellow in a shabby suit of gray.

There was no one else in the office.

The constable had carried off his poor, drunken prisoner and cleared the room of all the village idlers

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who had lounged in to witness the evil-doer's humiliation.

There is never much business going on in a country magistrate's office of that region.

Harcourt went up to the rail before the desk and said:

"Mr. Kilgour?"

"Yes. What is your will?" inquired the justice, looking up in surprise.

"My name is Harcourt—William Harcourt. You may remember me. I was employed at the Crest House last summer while you were there."

"Bless my soul! Yes, I remember you now! Bookkeeper or steward, or something of that sort."

"I was the hotel clerk."

"Exactly, exactly. Now, what do you want with me? What can I do for you, young man?"

"You can take my deposition and commit me to prison," said Harcourt, in the words he had so often mentally and bitterly rehearsed, and speaking them now in a strange apathy, as if he felt no personal interest in them.

"The Lord bless my soul alive!" exclaimed the justice, gazing at the self-accuser, as if he thought the latter had lost his reason.

And, indeed, the whole aspect of the young man justified the suspicion.

The justice had heard of cases in which guiltless men accused themselves of crime, and even suffered the punishment of it before their innocence was made clear as day. He suspected this to be a case in point. He desired to examine in private this candidate for imprisonment, so he said to his staring young clerk:

"Perry, I wish you would go to the post office and see if there are any letters for me by the morning mail."

The clerk unwillingly got off his stool, took his hat from its peg and slowly left the office.

"Now, then, young sir, what is all this about?" inquired the magistrate, in a kindly, confidential tone.

"I wish you to put me under oath and take my

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deposition, sir," said Harcourt, in the same mechanical manner of a man who had gone through this scene by foresight, until it had become "formula."

The justice looked at him wistfully, more than ever convinced that he was "off his head."

"Suppose you just tell me the story first and let me judge whether it is of sufficient importance to take the form of a deposition," he said, in a kindly, sympathizing tone one would use to a child, an invalid, or a lunatic.

"Very well, sir," said the young man, with a resigned air.

"Just take Perry's seat there, draw it closer to me and tell me all about it now," said the justice, in the same conciliatory tone.

"You remember the tragedy at the Isle of Storms on the fifteenth of September?"

"Good Heaven! Yes! That wretched sharper's suicide!"

"It was not suicide. I was the cause of Yelverton's death."

"Lord bless my soul!" exclaimed the magistrate.—"Mad as a March hare!" he muttered to himself.—Then: "Do you mean to tell me, you poor young fellow, that you murdered that blackleg?"

"No; not that. It was an accident."

"Then what in the name of heaven and earth have we to do with it now?"

"Everything! Everything!"

"The coroner's jury, of which I was one, if you remember——"

"I do remember."

"Decided that it was a suicide. If they made a mistake, and it was an accident, as you say, I can see no use in opening up the case again; for whether accident or suicide, it was a terrible case. I would not brood over it if I were you, young man," said the justice, in a compassionate tone.

"Pray listen to me," said Harcourt. "I told you it was an accident, but you gave me no time to explain that it was an accident that occurred in a life and

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death struggle between me and Yelverton for the possession of the pistol by which he met his death," said Harcourt.

The justice became more attentive.

"The gambler drew a pistol on you, then?" he inquired.

"Yes; but he had a lawful right to do so. I had entered his room in the dead of night for an unlawful purpose, using my pass key."

"Lord have mercy on us!" exclaimed the country magistrate, opening his full blue eyes to their largest extent. "This is really growing serious—very serious indeed."

"Now, sir, will you take my deposition under oath?" inquired Harcourt.

"Yes! yes! yes!—certainly! I have no choice but to do so!" exclaimed the justice, the more emphatically because of his first hesitation.

But as he spoke the shabby young clerk entered with a bundle of letters and papers in his hands, and was about to hang his hat on the peg, when the justice said:

"Lay the parcel on the table and go home to your dinner, Perry."

The young clerk cast a look of hungry curiosity to the strange occupant of his own stool, for he wanted news more than food, as it was hours before his dinner hour. But he did as he was bid, bowed, and left the office.

"I will take down your deposition in writing myself," said the justice, as soon as they were left alone. "Such duties belong to Perry, but I prefer to do this."

Harcourt bowed, and felt grateful.

The justice then took up the well-worn, official copy of the New Testament and administered the judicial oath in the usual form.

"Now, then, I will take your deposition," said the justice, drawing the paper before him.

Then Harcourt told the awful story of that night's

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tragedy in which Yelverton's life was lost, and in which his own soul went down into the abyss.

He told all without reservation. His engagement as hotel clerk at the Crest House; his obligation, out of office hours, to make himself agreeable to the guests by taking a hand at cards, or a partner in the dance, as he might be required to do; his sitting down to play with Yelverton on the night of the fifteenth of September, of the past year; the arrival of Charles Cutts, the Baltimore broker, who intrusted him with a large sum of money to be locked in the safe for security; of his putting that money in his pocket, until he should have finished his game; of the progress of that fatal game; of the seductive wine, the deceitful winnings leading him on; of the whole infernal machinery in which he had been caught and drawn in to destruction on that terrible night; of the horror of his awakening to the consciousness of having staked and lost the money intrusted to him; of his desperate resolve to recover that money; of his midnight visit to Yelverton's room; of the deadly struggle there, when the gambler discovered his presence, aimed the pistol at his heart, and would have shot him dead but for the lightning swiftness with which he rushed upon the sharper, and struck up the hand that held the weapon, which immediately went off, and shot the holder through the brain; of the mere animal instinct of self-preservation rather than any forethought that had driven him to lock the door on the inside, escape by the window, and close it by a spring; and hasten away from the scene of the tragedy before the household, alarmed by the shot, had gathered to the gambler's door, which they had to burst open.

The magistrate sighed and groaned in a very unmagisterial manner, during the whole time he was taking down this deposition.

At its close he called upon Harcourt to sign it.

When this had been done the justice said:

"That death, from the circumstances of the room closed from within, the discharged pistol clenched in

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the dead man's hand, and the watch, diamonds and pocketbook all safe, led to the verdict of suicide. It seemed such an unquestionable matter of self-murder."

"Yes," murmured Harcourt. "And I had immunity from suspicion."

"Yet late remorse has driven you to this confession."

"No! Heaven knows, not late remorse! My life has been one remorse ever since that awful night. I have never known a moment's peace since the death of Yelverton, although I did not kill him. I should have gone before the coroner's jury and told them the truth but that I was the only son of an aged and widowed mother, whom that truth would have killed. I should have told the truth, even under those circumstances, if I had been summoned as a witness, for not even to save her could I have foresworn myself. But I was not called. I was not needed. I was supposed to be too far from the scene of action to know anything. Indeed, I think I was never thought of as a witness. The proof of suicide seemed so overwhelming, so all-sufficient for a verdict. For my aged mother's sake only I kept the secret and bore the burden of my guilt for eight months."

The justice looked at the young man and sighed and groaned.

Harcourt continued:

"My mother went to her heavenly rest four days ago. After her funeral I lost no time in coming here to give myself up to justice. And now the burden is off my mind."

At that moment two persons entered the office—Perry, the clerk, just returned from his dinner, and Bean, the constable, back from escorting his prisoner to the county workhouse.

Perry hung up his hat on its peg and came immediately to take the seat that Harcourt had vacated for him.

Bean came up to the justice and reported the safe

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incarceration of his charge, and then wished to know if he should be needed any longer that day.

"Yes," said the justice, with a profound sigh, "I shall want you. Wait."

The constable sat down on the bench against the wall and sighed in his turn. He was "dead tired," to use his own phrase.

"I shall have to commit you to prison, pending the action of the grand jury," said the justice, turning to Harcourt, who bowed in silence.

CHAPTER VII

ROMA ON THE ISLE OF STORMS

It was the morning after the arrival of Miss Fronde and her party of protégés on the Isle of Storms.

Owlet was the first to wake.

She did not justify her nickname by sleeping away the hours of daylight.

Leaving her "Lady" fast asleep, she got up softly out of bed, washed and dressed, and went downstairs and out upon the plateau overhanging the sea in time to see the sun rise. She saw the sun suddenly sparkle up from the eastern horizon, and flash all over sea and sky.

She stood gazing, speechless with wonder and admiration, at the beauty and glory of the vision.

There was no exclamation of "Oh! oh! oh!" expressive of her delight, as there had been at the sight of the blooming orchards at Goblin Hall. She was awed into silent rapture by the sublimity of the rising sun above the boundless sea into the infinite sky.

A voice at her side broke the spell.

"Oh! ain't it just bully, neither, Miss Catherine?"

She turned, and saw Titus at her side. She could think of nothing more worthy of expressing her sentiments than to echo his words:

"Oh! ain't it just, Titus!"

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From a short distance, halfway down the hill on the right hand, a curl of white smoke rose from the chimney of Lucy's log cabin, which was half hidden by the stunted pine trees around it; and presently from the same direction came a sweet savor of fried fresh fish.

"Oh! but don't that make a body feel hungry—just!" Titus exclaimed, sniffing.

"Oh! don't it, just!" sympathetically responded Owlet.

"Let's go down there and get grub along of Tom and Aunt Lucy," suggested Titus.

"You can go, and I know Aunt Lucy and Tom will be awful glad to see you; but I wish to take my breakfast along of Lady," Owlet replied.

"Yes, to be sure; that's the most properest way for you to do, Miss Catherine," the boy admitted.

"And, see! There's Lady now, a-beckoning me from the front door. I must run in right away, and you may run down the hill and get your breakfast along of Aunt Lucy and Tom. They'll be mighty proud to have you," said Owlet, as she sped into the house.

Titus, consumed by a convalescent's devouring appetite, flung himself down the hill in eager haste lest something should happen to the fried fish before he could get his share.

He was warmly welcomed by Tom and Lucy, and given a seat at their pine table, and a plateful of their luxuries.

Meanwhile Owlet had entered the manor house.

"You are a lark, and not an owl, little one. Come in to breakfast," said Miss Fronde, as she took the child's hand and led her to a pleasant room, with all its windows looking out to sea.

The table was set for three.

"Where is Titus?" inquired Miss Fronde, as they took their seats at the board.

"Oh, he smelt fresh fish frying in Aunt Lucy's house, and he longed for it, and ran down the hill to get his breakfast along of her and Tom."

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"Poor boy! It is just because he has lately recovered from a long spell of illness," Roma said.

Wilet waited on the table, and she evidently had something on her mind which she wished to get off it, for as she handed dishes she sighed profoundly.

But Miss Fronde gave her no opportunity to unburden her soul, for as soon as breakfast was over she said to Owlet:

"We will walk to the fishing landing, dear, and see the fishermen haul the seine before we go to work."

"But I thought you always said, 'Work before play'," remarked the practical Owlet.

"And I say so still. But it is early yet, and the colored folks haven't had their breakfasts, and we can do nothing without their help in the heavy work that is before us," Roma explained.

"Oh, that, indeed! Then, of course, we shall have to give them time enough to get their breakfasts," admitted Owlet, with a candid air of conviction.

"And are you quite satisfied now, ma'am?" inquired Miss Fronde.

"Oh, yes—quite! I see it all now."

They went down the hill to the sands, where the fishermen were hauling the seine.

A row of the men stood on the beach, hauling at ropes fastened to the outer edge of the seine that had been laid out to sea.

They hauled with all their strength, swaying backward and forward, drawing in the seine and shortening the ropes, hand over hand, keeping time to a weird chant, in chorus, every sway bringing in the immense seine, with its heavy weight of captive fish, nearer and nearer upon the beach, until at last a great shoal of fish—silvery, shining, prismatic—tumbled in upon the sands, flashing, leaping and writhing in the new element.

The sight was as novel to Miss Fronde as to her small companion. Both gazed on the scene with interest.

Presently a gray-haired fisherman in a broad-brimmed straw hat, a red flannel shirt and blue check

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trousers, came up to Miss Fronde, took off his hat, and said:

"Excuse me, ma'am, but you are the lady as have just come into possession of this estate?"

"Yes," said Roma.

"Excuse me again, but me and my mates have heard some very bad news."

"I am very sorry for that. What is it?"

"We did hear as the new owner was going to take a royalty off our profits here—which, ma'am, them profits is so small that we can scarcely make out to keep body and soul together now, let alone paying royalties. Which, ma'am, I thought I would make bold to lay before you," said the old man, very deprecatingly.

"Do not be uneasy. I never had the slightest intention of exacting any such tax upon your toil here. Whoever spread such a report made a mistake, to put the most charitable construction on the falsehood," said Miss Fronde, flushing with indignation; for she was at no loss to know how that report had arisen, and that it had sprung from William Hanson's vain boasts during his usurpation of Roma Fronde's little kingdom.

"You do take a very great load off our minds, young lady. And we all thank you," gratefully exclaimed the fisherman.

"I am sorry that you should ever have been troubled by so malicious a rumor."

The old man turned his old straw hat about, and seemed to have something on his mind which he hesitated to utter.

Presently he said:

"It is true we always paid a tribute of fish to the squires here, but that came light; we did not feel it."

"And I am quite sure they never exacted it," said Miss Fronde.

"No; they never did. We offered it every time of our own free will, and took pleasure in so doing. And this is what I have been wanting to say, ma'am: If you would let us, we would be happy to make the

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same offering to yourself, ma'am. It is your right," the old man said, deprecatingly.

Roma reflected for a moment, and then decided that greater kindness and even greater respect would be shown to the fishermen in accepting their offer—which would lighten their debt without oppressing them—than by declining it and leaving them under the burden of a hopeless obligation to herself.

"Yes," she said, brightly; "I thank you very much. I should like a fresh fish now and then for breakfast or dinner. Good-morning."

The man touched his hat.

Roma turned away, leading the child.

"What do you think of the seine hauling?" she inquired of her small companion.

"Oh, it was splendid! They looked like rainbows! Oh! ain't there so many things to see in this world! And so many people! And so many places! But I was sorry for the poor fishes. I know it hurt 'em," said Owlet.

Roma made no reply to this observation. She herself had had many grave thoughts on the question of why man must kill to live.

Climbing up the hill, they came in sight of Lucy's log hut.

"Shall we go in and see our friends there?" inquired Miss Fronde.

"Oh, yes, indeedy!" heartily responded Owlet.

They turned aside into a little half-hidden path, leading along the broad ledge of rocky, sandy soil and stunted pine and cedar saplings halfway up the hill.

The cabin stood in the midst of these trees, but with clearing enough, immediately around it, for a little flower garden in front and a little vegetable garden in the back.

In the front garden grew a number of old-fashioned flowers, such as larkspurs, pinks, Sweet Williams, ragged robins, morning glories, and so forth, in the very bad company of many weeds and briers.

As for the vegetable garden in the rear, it was a little wilderness, given over to night shade, nettles

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and other obnoxious growths, with the exception of a peach tree, a cherry tree and an apple tree, all rather stunted and ragged looking, but bearing, or trying to bear, fruit in the season.

The cabin itself was quite a spacious one, with a loft and a back "lean to," a door in front, with a window on each side.

Tom was in the little front garden, stooping down and grubbing up the weeds, with his back toward the visitors, for which reason, and also because he was so deeply interested in his work, he did not perceive their approach until they were close upon him, and Owlet called out:

"Say, Tom! We have looked at that patch on the back of your trousers all we want to! And we know it's a blue patch on brown trousers; and we saw you sewing it your own self that day we called to see your mammy before we left the city! And it was a credit to you, Tom. So you needn't look so ashamed of yourself," said Owlet; for the boy, who had sprung up like a jumping-jack at the first sound of her voice, now stood bobbing and embarrassed before her.

"How is your mammy, Tom?" inquired Miss Fronde, coming to his relief.

"Oh! Mammy? She's a-stan'in' on her head, ma'am," replied the boy, with a grin.

"What!" demanded the young lady, in amazement, not to say horror.

"W'ich I on'y meant to say as she was mons'ous p'oud to get home, ma'am—mammy is, yes'm."

"Oh!" said Miss Fronde, as she led the child up the grass-grown path to the cabin door.

Lucy, who had heard their approach, appeared upon the threshold to welcome them, and made a low courtesy.

"Well, Lucy, how do you find yourself after your voyage?" Miss Fronde inquired, as they met.

"Oh, young mist'ess, doane talk! I so happy I doane know wot to do! It do seem jes' like a jeame. I's 'feared to wake up an' fin' myse'f back 'g'in yon'er in de city."

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"I am so very glad that you are so pleased to get home again," said Miss Fronde, in a sympathetic tone.

"P'eased! P'eased ain't no word fo' it! No, youn' mist'ess. But come in an' set down, an' see how nice I'se got fix' up a'yeady," said Lucy, leading the way into the house.

The room was rudely built and rudely furnished, yet pleasant and attractive. Its walls were of logs with the bark on, its floor of planks. Its front door, with a window on each side, opened upon the flower garden. Its back door, to the left of the fireplace, opened into the rear "lean to."

In one of the front corners was a clean bedstead and bed, covered with a patchwork quilt, boasting all the colors of the rainbow. In the other front corner was an antique chest of drawers that would not have brought two dollars in the neighborhood of Snowden, but which might have been the envy and despair of a modern fashionable collector. This was surmounted by a tall mirror, decorated with a plume of peacock's feathers. In one of the back corners was a dresser, adorned with rows of bright-patterned crockeryware and highly polished tins and pewters. In the other back corner was a pine table, covered with a snow-white cloth, and decorated with a stone jar of water, in which stood up a large bunch of pink, blue, white and purple larkspur and ragged robins picked that morning from the neglected garden.

Near this table stood a wooden stand with a pail of fresh spring water on it, covered with a thin pine board on which lay the half of a gourd, hollowed out and dried, to be used as a dipper.

One high-back, chip-bottom rocking-chair and a few other wooden chairs completed the furniture.

"Take dis yere cha', young mist'ess," said Lucy, pushing forward the rocker.

Miss Fronde smiled and sat down.

"An' yo' take dis yittle cha', Miss Cafferine," she added, bringing what she called her own "mos' favorite" low seat forward for the child.

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"An' 'ow's yo' been, Miss Cafferine?" she inquired, as Owlet took the offered chair.

"Very well, I thank you. And how do you do yourself?" asked the matter-of-fact child.

"Oh, I'se mons'ous peert, I is, Miss Cafferine."

"Yes, and you had fried fresh fish for breakfast. I smelt 'em," said Owlet, with a touch of reproach in her tone.

"Well, an' so we had! An' didn' yo' hab no f'esh fish fo' yo' breakfas', too?"

"No, we just hadn't! We had nothing but nasty old spring chickens and eggs and things."

"Well, now, ef I had on'y 'a' knowed dat I'd 'a' sent yo' some! Yo' see, young mist'ess," said the woman, turning to Roma, "fuss fing dis mornin' I takes myse'f down to de fishin' landin' bright an' yearly, an' gets de f'esh fish yight out'n de water, an' w'ich, ef I had 'a' known how yo' an' Miss Cafferine yere hadn' got none an' would 'a' liked some, I'd 'a' fotch 'em up to you'. Well, I'll know better anoder time."

"Never mind that, Lucy. But are you ready to begin your day's work up at the house?"

"Lor', yes, youn' mist'ess! I were jus' finkin' ob startin' out fo' it w'en yo' come inter dat do'—'deed was I!"

"Well, then, come along now and bring Tom with you to help to fetch the goods up from the boat-house, where they were left last night."

"Yes, young mist'ess. Tom ain't got nuffin' to do but fool 'long o' dem weeds, an' I yeckon ef dey been growin' dere year arter year ebber sence we been 'way seekin' ob our fortin an' nebber fin'in' it, and dey ain't 'stroyed de garden yoot an' b'anch 'fo' now, dey woane hurry up an' do it in two free days," said Lucy.

"Oh, I shall not want Tom more than a few hours to-day," said Miss Fronde, rising.

Lucy put on her sunbonnet and followed her young mistress and the child up the hill to the manor house.

A very busy day followed.

'Rusalem and Tom were kept hard at work, bring-

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ing to the house and unpacking loads of cots, mattresses, bed-clothes, house linen, crockeryware, groceries, dry goods and all the multifarious articles required for the fitting up of the little sanitarium.

Titus, though he was not yet strong, was very anxious to help; but Miss Fronde would only allow him to take such light tasks as would give him healthful exercise without taxing his strength.

In the house Miss Fronde and her women, Wilet and Lucy, were actively engaged in arranging the furniture and storing the provisions.

Of all the upper chambers in that spacious mansion Miss Fronde reserved only one for herself—the right-hand, first floor front.

Of the lower rooms, she reserved only the parlor chamber for any friend who might visit the isle.

In each of the large, square bedrooms she set up four little cots, so that she had accommodations for forty children. Then she regretted her haste in having—on coming into this property—caused all the additional building of framework to be pulled down.

"It was all my selfishness," she said to herself, in self-condemnation. "It was all my selfishness. I thought only of myself posing as the magnificent hostess of a seaside paradise, with troups of fashionable and worshiping visitors! As if I and my personal friends had the divine right to monopolize the Lord's life and health-giving agents of pure air and sea! Ah! it is well I have come to my senses!"

Little Owlet was as helpful in light work inside as Titus was outside. She soon learned to spread the white counterpanes neatly over the cots, and to slip the cases over the pillows.

By set of sun all the ten rooms assigned to the sanitarium had been arranged and all the provisions stored in presses and pantries.

Lucy and Tom went to their cabin.

'Rusalem and Wilet retired to their kitchen.

Titus was given his supper and sent to bed in the little hall room at the head of the stairs, that had been assigned to him.

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Even the little owl was not so wide awake as she should have been in the gloaming; and so, after disposing of her bowl of milk and bread, she "owned up" to being tired and sleepy, kissed her "Lady" good-night, and put herself to bed.

Roma had worked as hard as any of her assistants that day, yet she was not tired. Her fine physique would have carried her through much more exertion without fatigue.

She sat reclining in a rocking-chair beside an old-fashioned round table that occupied the center of her parlor floor. A shaded moderator lamp, a few books and a portable writing desk stood on it. She was not weary, as we have said; yet she felt the delight of repose, and indulged it for some minutes.

Then she drew the little writing desk before her, opened it, and began to write letters to the physicians of the poor in Washington, Georgetown and Baltimore, explaining the plan of her small private sanitarium, with its limited accommodations for only forty children, and to suggest to them, if her plan should meet their approval, that they should send down to her, at her own expense, and in the care of proper nurses, such sick poor children as they should think were the most in need and would be the most benefited by the sea air. For her personal and financial responsibility she referred her correspondents to leading physicians and others in Washington.

Roma was still engaged in this work when there came a light, timid knock at the door.

To Miss Fronde's pleasant "Come in!" there entered Wilet, who had carried a burden on her mind all day long and could bear it no longer.

She dropped a courtesy and then stood still in the country negro woman's attitude of submission, with arms folded over her bosom and head a little drooped —corresponding to, and yet differing from, the private soldier's position of "attention" before his superior officer.

"Well, Violet, what is it? I thought you were tired

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enough to have been in bed before this," said Miss Fronde.

"N-o-o, youn' mist'ess," drawled the black woman, shaking her head with ominous gravity—"n-o-o, youn' mist'ess. N-o-o sleep hab wisited my eyelids, nor likewise 'Rusalem's, since you've come."

"I am very sorry that my home-coming should have broken your rest; but why should it have done so? what is the matter?" inquired Miss Fronde, in surprise and perplexity.

"Oh, youn' mist'ess! An' you ax me w'y an' wot's de matter! Oh, me! Oh, dear! Oh, Lor'! I hab got no yight, nor likewise call, to chastise my parstors, an' marsters, an' mist'esses, an' sponsors in de Lor'! W'ich I humbly ax yo' pardon fo' 'sumin' so fo' to do. But I nussed yo' own mudder, an' in co'se feel an' int'rest in yo', ma'am. Youn' mist'ess, me an' my ole man hab got a mos' heaby burden ob care an' soyer on our hearts 'count ob yo'."

"I do not know what you mean, Violet, though I am sure you mean well," said Miss Fronde, kindly.

"Oh, youn' mist'ess, wey's yo' husban'? 'Taine 'spectable fo' a youn' mayyed lady to be libin' 'part f'om her husban'! Oh, ma'am, I'se feared I's ve'y bole to talk dis a-way to yo'. But—but—w'en I fink ob yo' bein' yo' dear mudder's own darter, an' she in glory, an' ole Marse Henery G'yon's own g'andarter, an' he so high an' mighty, I—I—I——"

Here Wilet broke off in her discourse, dropped down on a stool, threw her apron over her head and burst into a storm of sobs and tears.

Miss Fronde did not interrupt her by any attempt at explanation or consolation. She knew that it would be best to let the paroxysm have its way.

She was thinking most earnestly. And now she recognized that the time had come when she must confide in these faithful family servants, Wilet and 'Rusalem, to prevent misunderstanding. But her confidence need go no further than these two. Lucy and Tom, Owlet and Titus, knew her only as Miss Fronde.

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Wilet and 'Rusalem erroneously believed her to be Mrs. Hanson.

Already there might have been some very perplexing comparison of notes between these two parties.

Roma felt anxious to ascertain if such had been the case.

So as soon as Wilet had got through her hysterics Miss Fronde inquired:

"Has there been any talk on this subject between you or Jerusalem and Lucy or Tom?"

"Who? Me an' 'Rusalem talk to dem niggers 'bout wot take p'ace 'tween yo' an' de youn' marse on de island yere? N-o-o, youn' mist'ess! An' ef we had been so 'clin', dere was somefin' as would 'a' 'vented us f'om lettin' our tongues yun."

"What was that?"

"W'y, we bofe soon seed as how dem o'ders all 'sidered yo' fo' to be a single young damson as wa'n't nebber mayyed; an' dat w'ite boy, Titus, even he bring a messidge to 'Rusalem say, 'Miss F'on'' say so and so. Me an' my ole man t'ought dat mons'ous cur'ous. An' 'Rusalem say, he say: ''Pen' 'pon it, Wilet, somefin's yong,' he say. An' I say: ''Pen' 'pon it, ole man, we had better hole our tongues,' I say. An' so we did, youn' mist'ess; but we did ponder in our hearts a heap, I tell yo'."

Roma reflected profoundly for some moments, and then inquired:

"Violet, has your husband gone to bed?"

"Who gone to bed? 'Rusalem? No-o, youn' mist'ess," drawled the woman, in the most sepulchral of voices. "No-o, ma'am, 'Rusalem have not gone to bed, 'Rusalem haven't. He's a-settin' on a stool in de kitchen chimbly corner, jus' as if it was winter, dough dere's no fire into it. He's settin' in de chimbly corner, wid his g'ay head tuck' down unner de jams, a-smokin' ob his pipe an' a-breakin' ob his heart, all on 'count ob yo', youn' mist'ess."

Yes, clearly the time had come when she must confide in these faithful old family servants. Roma recog-

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nized their true and tender interest in her, and knew them worthy of her trust.

No petty self-consciousness, no jealous fear of compromising her own dignity, such as might have blinded and hindered a less pure and noble woman, interfered with her recognition of their single-eyed devotion to her interests—a devotion that did not even shrink from incurring her resentment in the discharge of what they considered their duty to herself.

"Go and ask your husband to come here with you. I have something to tell you both," said Miss Fronde.

Wilet dropped her courtesy and went her errand.

The clock struck ten.

Presently 'Rusalem and Wilet came in. 'Rusalem bowed, Wilet courtesied, and both stood still "at attention."

"Take seats," said the young lady.

They bent their heads, and sat down on chairs, side by side, looking very solemn and expectant, while their mistress reclined in her rocker and reflected.

At length Miss Fronde spoke. And then and there she told her two old servants of the strange, mysterious, fraudulent marriage ceremony by which she had been made the bride of an imposter, while she believed herself to be wedding her betrothed lover.

She told the cruel story without reservation, from the hour when she entered the little church in South Washington to become the wife of her affianced lover, William Harcourt, to the hour when she missed her rightful bridegroom and was confronted by the usurper, William Hanson, with the astounding announcement that he was her lawful husband; that Harcourt had renounced her at the altar, and had abandoned her on the threshold of their new home. Roma told her story very deliberately, and in the simplest words she could find, so that the slow intelligence of her hearers might receive and possibly understand a narrative that might have puzzled and confounded much brighter intellects than theirs.

The two negroes listened with grave attention,

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groaned and exchanged glances many times during the progress of the narration, but made no comment.

When Miss Fronde had finished her story, she said:

"Now you will understand what seemed so strange and so wrong in my treatment of the usurper, Hanson; why I kept him so rigidly at a distance; why I would never permit him to pass the threshold of my chamber; why I would never sit down at the same table with him; why I would never stay an instant in the same room with him; why I would never receive a note or answer a message from him; why I forbade you to utter his name in my presence, or my name to him; why, in fine, I refused to recognize his presence in the house, or even his existence in the world. Had I not taken this uncompromising course I should have found it much more difficult to procure that legal redress which I subsequently did procure, and which set aside the fraudulent marriage ceremony as unlawful, null and void. Now you know why Hanson locked up the boat in the boathouse and kept the keys strictly in his own possession, and refused to let me have the use of one, though they were all my own; refused to let Jerusalem have one to take a letter to the post office for me. Now you know that he kept me a captive here, cut off from communication with all my friends, lest I should seek that legal redress which he knew would set me free from the shadow of a claim that fraudulent ceremony might have seemed to give him. And, finally, you know why I sent that carrier pigeon to Goblin Hall, where his mate was in the care of my aunt, Mrs. Gray, and to which he would be sure to fly as soon as let loose. I wrote a note to my aunt asking her to come to my relief. I fastened the note under the wing of the bird and let him loose from a west window. My aunt came with her husband the next day and took me away. The deliverance was quietly effected while Hanson lay in the coma of intoxication."

"Yes; but dere was a circus dat night w'en he wake up an' foun' yo' gone! Umph! umph! Lor'! how me an' my ole angel had to lie to keep him quiet

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long as we could! But ef we'd 'a' knowed—Lor'! ef we'd 'a' knowed! Umph! umph!" exclaimed Wilet, speaking for the first time.

Miss Fronde did not notice the interruption, but continued:

"I went to Washington with my friends, and there in the city where the felonious ceremony had been perpetrated, I, two weeks later, was released by the court, which ruled that there had been no marriage at all. So you see that I am still Roma Fronde, and have never for an instant been anybody else or borne any other name. My nearest friends and relatives know this now. My poór people brought down from Washington, however, know nothing whatever of that false and wicked ceremony that had nearly wrecked my life, nor is it necessary or desirable that they should ever hear of it. Therefore, I wish you both to give me your word of honor that you will never speak of this affair except to each other, and in the privacy of your apartment," said Miss Fronde.

Neither 'Rusalem nor Wilet—with one exception—had interrupted their mistress by a single word during the whole course of her narrative.

Their respect for her, deepened into reverential tenderness by the story of her wrongs, sufferings and heroic struggles, as well as by what they considered her condescension in confiding that story to them, had held them in silent, worshipful attention. But now that she "deigned," as they secretly called it, to ask them to give her their "word of honor" not to speak of the matter to anyone else—holding them her only confidants, the only sharers of her secret on the island—their enthusiasm was almost beyond their own control.

Both started to exclaim at once, but Wilet promptly put her broad, fat hand before 'Rusalem's mouth, and said:

"Now, yo' jes' shut up yo' 'tater trap, ole man! Doane yo' know as dis is a berry deliky 'fair, as mus' be 'ten' to by de female seck, an' not by de male?"

'Rusalem collapsed.

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Wilet took up the argument. She arose and stood before her mistress and began to speak in the solemn tone she thought suitable to the occasion, and said:

"Youn' mist'ess, ef so be as it would do yo' any good, ef it would set yo' mine at ease 'bout dis 'fai', ef it would make yo' feel mo' safe an' sho' to know as not on'y we wouldn' tell but as we couldn' tell ef we wanted to—well, I gwine say dis: Me an' my ole man is willin' to cut our two tongues out yight yere 'fo' we leabe dis yoom."

"Oh, Lor-r-r'!" groaned 'Rusalem.

"Dere! I can't say no fai'er dan dat! Wot yo' say, 'Rusalem? W'y doane yo' speak up like a man? Wouldn' yo' be willin' to do as I 'pose fo' de youn' mist'ess? Speak up, man!"

"Oh, Lor-r-r'!" groaned 'Rusalem, in the most lugubrious of tones. "Yo' do it to yo' tongue, Wilet, honey! Dat'll be 'nuff fo' yo' to do it! Dere aine no danger ob me blabbin'! Men can keep secrets, but it's well beknown as women can't. Yo' do it, Wilet. 'Deed, yo' better had. I go get de big shea's fo' yo'. I—I len' yo' my jack-knife," he whined, in a persuasive tone, as he drew the tool from his pocket, opened its largest blade and handed it to her.

She struck the instrument out of his hand—forgetful, for the moment, of the respect due to the presence of her mistress.

"Des year dat ole hipkit! I yeckon I will! 'N'ess yo' will! Woane gib yo' sich a 'wantage ober me as dat, nohow! Come no'! Cut away! Cut away at yo' own yard o' yed yag!" she exclaimed.

'Rusalem looked so utterly miserable that Roma came to his rescue.

"Take heart, Jerusalem," she said, half smiling. "I shall neither require nor permit any such mad martyrdom in my cause, or as a proof of your devotion to me, which I do not doubt. Wilet knows this just as well as I do."

"Year dat, ole man?" whispered the woman, digging her elbow into her lord and master's ribs. "Year dat, ole fool man? Year dat, ole idlit? W'y didn' yo'

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'sent to do as I offer fo' to do? W'y didn' yo' say, 'Yes, wid all de pleasure in life'? W'y didn' yo' say dat? Dere wa'n't no danger. Yo' might a' knowed de youn' mist'ess would nebber hab 'lowed it. Yo' wouldn' 'a' run no ris'. An' it would 'a' bin sich a purty fing to say! Oh, yo' onlucky ole idlit!"

The clock struck eleven.

"Now, then, are you satisfied?" inquired Miss Fronde, as a prelude to the dismissal of her servants.

"No, not quite, ma'am! Not quite! Dere is somefin yet onto my mine," said Wilet.

"Well, what is it?"

"W'y didn' yo' 'fide in me an' 'Rusalem w'en you' firs' fin' out 'bout dat gran' wilyun da' in' fo' to 'trude yere, an' 'ten' to be yo' husban'? W'y didn' yo' 'peal to yo' own fai'ful ole servan's, as was yo' mudder's 'fo' yo', an' her fader's 'fo' her? Yes, ma'am—w'y didn' yo' do dat?" pleaded the woman, with an injured air.

"Yes, youn' mist'ess, w'y didn' yo' do dat? Us free would 'a' been too many fo' dat yiff-yaff," chimed in 'Rusalem.

"Though you were old family servants at Guyon Hall, you were entire strangers to me. How did I know your dispositions? How did I know but that if I appealed to you Hanson—who is the most plausible of devils, and who had all appearances in his favor, besides—might not have persuaded you that he was in truth my husband, but that I was not in my right mind? In that case I should have been in a worse plight than before. I should have had three against me instead of one."

"No, yo' wouldn', youn' mist'ess. No, yo' wouldn', 'deed. Neider me nor my ole man 'ould ebber tuke de word ob strangers an' furriners agin' dat ob our own parsters an' marsters—no ma'am," indignantly exclaimed Wilet.

"But, you see, I did not know that. I did not know you," said Miss Fronde.

"Seems to me yo' might o', youn' mist'ess. Oh, ef yo'd on'y 'fided into us! We'd 'a' fixed him!"

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"Would you?"

"Yes, ma'am, we would! We'd 'a' put him w'ere de dogs wouldn' 'a' barked at him! We'd 'a' put him w'ere he nebber could trubble yo' nor nobody no mo' in dis worl'!"

"Why, what do you mean, Violet?" uneasily inquired Miss Fronde.

"Nebber yo' min', youn' mist'ess, ma'am, wot I mean, honey. I get yid ob him! Nebber min' how! I puts him out'n de way—nebber min' w'ere. Yes, dat wot I do!"

"Violet! You—you—surely do not mean to hint that you would have—murdered the man?" demanded the young lady, shrinking from the speaker.

"Phew! Lor'! youn' mist'ess, yo' gib me de shivers! Yo' make me feel like snow was meltin' all ober my skin! N-o-o-o, youn' mist'ess, I nebber would 'a' done no sich a fing as dat! No mo' would my ole angel dere. N-o-o-o, youn' mist'ess, we wouldn't broke no 'mandments, nor likewise been hung fo' dat w'ite herrin'! But we'd 'a' 'sposed ob him—we'd 'a' 'sposed ob him! Oh! wouldn' we?"

"But how would you have done it? I am really curious to know your idea," said Miss Fronde.

"Dis a-way, den, ma'am. Ef yo's boun' fo' to know, co'se I'se boun' fo' to tell. Well, w'en dat w'ite trash was layin' down dere on de bedyoom floo', dead junk, an' too heaby fo' me an' my ole man to lif' up to bed—ef we had knowed, 'stead ob watchin' ob him, an' 'tendin' ob him, an' pityin' ob him, as we did, we would jus' hab tied a good, stron' yope youn' his legs an' drawed him out'n dat yoom, an' down dem sta's, an' out'n dis house, an' all de way down to de beach, jus' like drawin' a baby carridge, an' we ties him han' an' foot, an' puts him into dat ole boat lyin' upside down on de san's, an' we shoves it off to sea! An' we washes our hans' ob him, an' de Lor' hab massy on his soul! as de judge say w'en he put de yope youn' a po' sinner's neck! Fo' I yeckon as dat gran' wilyun nebber come back to de lan' ag'in!"

"But, good Heaven, Violet! That would have been

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murder, indeed—murder just as foul as if you had cut the man's throat, and even more cruel and barbarous!" exclaimed Miss Fronde, deeply shocked at the morality of the woman for whom she had cherished a sincere regard.

"Now, youn' mist'ess, p'ease doane yo' talk like dat a-way to me. Yo' do gi' me de shivers. I couldn' do no sich a deed as yo' say, an' w'ich I couldn' eber name de name ob, mo' less do it. I wouldn' 'a' hurted a hai' ob dat w'ite herrin's head, mo' less do dat to him. N-o-o-o, ma'am! Me an' my ole man aine such low-life sinners as dat. An', likewise, didn' wan' to be hung fo' dat trash. We wouldn' 'a' tetched to hurt him. We would on'y 'a' tied him han' an' foot w'en he was dead junk an' put him in de water-log boat an' shove him off to sea, an' leabe him to de Lor' to do wot he p'eased wiv. Now, doane yo' see, youn' mist'ess? Dat wouldn' 'a' been no harm. Dat would on'y 'a' been han'in' him over to de Lor' an' washin' our han's ob him. Couldn' make nuffin' out'n dat; no, indeed, dey couldn'," said Wilet, shaking her head.

"I think the law would have made murder out of it and meted out its penalty," gravely replied Miss Fronde.

"De law moughty unjus' to we po' colored folks, eben w'en we's doin' our bressed dooty. I know dat," said Wilet, with suppressed indignation.

"The law would have called such a crime by the same name, and dealt out the same doom, had it been committed by the most eminent white men in the land."

"Lor' a massy on me, youn' mist'ess! What yo' talkin' 'bout? I aine 'mitted ob no keeime, no mo' hab my ole man dere."

"I thank Heaven that you have not. And I do hope that your horrible talk of what you would have done under certain circumstances was only talk," said Miss Fronde.

The clock struck twelve.

"Now, doane yo' see, Wilet, as yo's a-keepin' de

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youn' mist'ess outen her bed at dis onlawful hour ob de night?" suggested 'Rusalem.

"So we is, ole man. Yo's in de yight ob it fo' once. Good-night, youn' mist'ess," said the woman, dropping her courtesy.

"Good-night, Violet. Harbor no malice."

'Rusalem bent his head in silence, and both retired from the room.

"Ole man," said Wilet, as they went to their loft over the kitchen, "did yo' yeally wan' yo' po' ole 'oman to cut yout her tongue?"

"Lor', no, Wilet! No, honey. Not fo' de worl'. Not eben fo' my free papers."

"F'ee papers! Wot yo' wan' long o' f'ee papers? Doane yo' know yo's been f'ee eber since 'manicipation?"

"I keeps forgettin' ob it, 'cause it doane make no diff'ence to me."

"An you' didn' wan' me to cut out my tongue?"

"No, chile; dough yo' tongue is mons'ous aggravokin' sometimes. I knowed yo' wouldn' do it, an' likewise de youn' mist'ess wouldn' 'a' 'lowed it. I was on'y t'yin' to fool yo'. On'y a-foolin', yo' know."

"Umph, umph! Yo' needin' do dat, ole man. Yo' needn' chy to fool. Yo' do dat widout chyin'. Yo' do nuffin else, as I see, all de time."

"Dere now. Ef she had cut out her tongue, she couldn' 'a' said dat to me, an' sich fings as she allers is a-sayin'," grumbled Jerusalem, as they climbed the little stairs leading to their roost.

Meanwhile Roma Fronde fell into deep thought.

What pagans these poor colored people of hers were, after all! With all their affection, conscientiousness and devotion, how really heathenish! Who was responsible for their moral and spiritual blindness and perversity? Ah! Roma felt that there was a difficult work before her—an almost hopeless work to begin on the old, whose state seemed to be beyond human power to improve.

But there were the young. They might yet be freed from the slavery of the inherited paganism of many

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centuries—the paganism that, in so many cases, perverted the pure Christian religion they professed into mere superstition, and their worship into orgies, and blinded them to all moral and spiritual meaning in its teachings, as was manifest in the case of Violet, who could not be made to see that the binding and shoving off an unconscious man in a leaky boat to sea could possibly be murder, either in the sight of God or man.

Yet an hour longer Roma sat reflecting. Then she arose, lighted her bedroom candle, turned down the light of her lamp, and went upstairs to her room.

That night she could not sleep; but, having put on her white wrapper, and put out the light, she sat by the open window looking out on the starlit sky and the open sea. When her eyes became accustomed to the darkness she saw the fishermen on the beach and in boats on the sea. They were all engaged in laying out the seines for the morning's haul. Some one else in a boat approaching the Isle from the mainland saw them also.

Presently Roma closed the sash, but left the shutters open, and drew down the thin, white shade. Then she went to bed, fell asleep and slept some little time, when a strange sense of uneasiness awakened her. She could not compose herself to sleep again, but arose, lighted her lamp and began to walk up and down the floor, sometimes pausing before the window. Was it the unconscious, occult influence of the despairing spirit below her window that affected her? She walked until day was dawning; then she turned down the light of her lamp and lay down again, but with a weight on her heart which she could neither understand nor resist.

She slept no more, but at her usual hour—sunrise—she arose and dressed and went downstairs to begin the day.

It was a busy day, passed in putting "finishing touches" on the dormitories, dining room and playroom of the invalid children with whom she expected to fill her house.

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Late in the afternoon of that day Roma sat in her little office in the rear of the central hall, writing letters and waiting for her messenger whom she had dispatched that morning to Snowden for her mail, by which she expected answers to her advertisements for a competent matron and skillful nurses for her little sanitarium.

Titus sat on one side of her with a slate in his hand, adding up a sum in simple addition which she had set for him.

Owlet sat on the other side, piecing squares for her "sensible quilt."

"Lady," she suddenly said, "I wish you would teach me to sew on the thumper-thumper, so I could make nightgowns and things for the poor, little, sick children who are coming here to get well."

"I will teach you to sew, dear," gently replied Roma, who was too wise a woman to discourage a little child's desire to be useful. "But what do you mean by a thumper-thumper?"

"A thing you sit down to and work at with hands and feet both, and turn off work quick as lightning. You know Mrs. Annie I told you about?"

"Yes."

"Well, Mrs. Annie had one that she worked on day and night, and sometimes made as many as twenty-five little gowns in a day," she said.

"That was a sewing machine."

"Now I think the man that made it was possessed of common sense."

"It was begun when he was a poor boy and not perfected until his middle age. He was the son of a poor young widow, and they lived with his grandmother, a poor old widow. Both these poor women sewed day and night with their needles, doing slow work and getting little pay. The boy was an apprentice in a machine factory of some sort. He saw how much men's labor was lightened by machinery, and he thought of his poor mother and grandmother and their tedious needlework, and what a pity it was that there was no machine for doing needlework. So he

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set to thinking hard about one. Angels helped with inspiration. They always do, Owlet, when we want to do a good work."

"Yes, I know. They are possessed of common sense —loads and loads of common sense."

"He invented the sewing machine in his youth, but perfected it after years of toil in his maturity. So you see, Owlet, the sewing machine was created by love."

At this moment 'Rusalem came in and laid the mail bag on the table with an audible sigh.

"You are very late," said Miss Fronde.

"Yes, ma'am, I's berry late," said 'Rusalem, with a profound groan.

Miss Fronde looked up with surprise, and inquired:

"Why, what is the matter with you, Jerusalem? You seem to be in great trouble. What is it?"

"Oh, ma'am, I is in g'eat chubble—de g'eates' chubble I ebber was in all my life, youn' mist'ess! My po' ole heart's b'oke. Please, ma'am, le' me sit down. I'm gibbin' way in de knees."

"Certainly. Take that leather resting-chair, and tell me what is the matter, and if I can help you," said Miss Fronde, who saw that the man was quite overcome, both mentally and physically.

'Rusalem sank down in the chair, drew his bandanna handkerchief—a memento of Hanson's usurpation—from his pocket, and wiped his face and his eyes, from which tears were constantly oozing.

"Now tell me."

"Yes, ma'am," with a deep sigh. "You 'member dat time w'en de gambler were foun' dead in his bed yere, shot t'rough de head, an' de c'roner's jury made out it were susanside?"

"Yes, yes."

"Oh, ma'am! It wa'n't no susanside! Dat youn' ge'man as was clerkin' yere at de time—he has 'fessed as he did it! He has 'fessed to dat murder 'fo' Squire Kilgour, an' he has been hauled off to jail. I seen him go. Dat made me late."

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CHAPTER VIII

THE TERRIBLE NEWS

ALMOST any other woman, suddenly pierced by this sharp blow, might have shrieked, fainted or fallen into hysterics. Either outlet might have given some relief to the inward anguish.

But Roma Fronde's strong physique held her soul in such bondage that neither tear, nor cry, nor merciful swoon relieved her. She sat still as stone, gazing on the news-bringer, with fixed eyes, like one spell-bound, or in a trance.

"I lubbed dat youn' ge'man, I did! I lubbed him like he were my own son, w'ich de Lor' nebber did fabor me nor likewise my ole 'oman wid none! He were mons'ous good to us, he were, w'en he were yere clerkin' 'long o' Tom Todd, he were. An' now it do almos' b'eak my po', ole heart to fink he is haul' off to jail fo' murder!" wailed 'Rusalem.

"But he never did murder, Jerusalem. He is incapable of committing a crime," said Roma, in a voice so strange, hollow and sepulchral that she scarcely recognized it as her own.

"Oh, ma'am! I wish he hadn't done it, wiv all my heart an' soul! I do! But he 'fessed it, youn' mis-t'ess! He 'fessed it! I wouldn' 'a' b'liebed anybody but his own lips! But he 'fessed it hisse'f, po', dea' youn' ge'man, he 'fessed it hisse'f," whimpered the negro.

"Did you hear him?" inquired the lady, in the same dead-level tone.

"No, ma'am, not me; but de squire did; he year him, an' he 'mitted ob him to jail. So Cons'ble Bean say; so all de people say."

"But for all that—though self-accused, he is not guilty. I would stake my salvation on that! Oh, Jerusalem! you who knew and loved him! how can you imagine such an impossibility as that William Harcourt should be a murderer?" pleaded Roma

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Fronde, finding some faint touch of comfort in defending her beloved even to this poor, old negro, because he loved Will Harcourt.

"I nebber did 'maginate it, ma'am, ob my own se'f, not likewise I nebber would 'a' b'liebed ef he hisse'f hadn' 'fessed it to de magister," whined 'Rusalem.

"I do not believe it, even on his own confession! I know that he is no murderer," emphatically declared Roma Fronde.

"Oh, ma'am, ef he aine no sich fing, ef dat youn' ge'man aine, en' ef so it's prove, an' he's let go free, I be de werry happies' darky in dis worl'. But ef he didn' do it, w'at make him 'fess'd w'en nobody 'cused him, nor likewise 'spicioned him? Dat's w'at I'd like fo' to know," said the old man, in a cogitating manner.

Roma paused and reflected.

Should she tell this faithful servant what was on her own mind?

Yes, she would. He was as honest, trustworthy and reverential as it was possible for a human creature to be. He was utterly worthy of her confidence. She turned to him solemnly and said:

"Jerusalem, Mr. Harcourt is perfectly guiltless of the terrible crime with which he charges himself. And I will tell you how I know that he is so in the face of his own self-accusation. I know it, first, from my intimate acquaintance with his character and disposition; and, secondly, from another circumstance, of which I am about to put you in possession. Mr. Harcourt had a severe brain fever immediately after the tragedy on this island, which brought him to the brink of the grave, and from which, his friends think, he never entirely recovered. They think—we think that it left his mind in a deranged state. Deranged minds, you are, perhaps, aware, are haunted by strange delusions, sometimes——"

"Strange—w'at, youn' mist'ess?"

"Strange fancies."

"Oh, yes! sure 'nough dey does! Dere's old Mr. Paul Dent, ober to Snowden, w'at 'maginates hisse'f to be de Bresiden' ob de Benited States—yes, ma'am,

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he do, an' it make him werry p'oud and happy. Yes, ma'am, I un'erstan'," said the negro, nodding.

"Yes, but their imaginings are not always so cheerful. Some persons, so afflicted, have imagined that they have committed crimes, which they were quite incapable of committing."

"De Lor'!" exclaimed 'Rusalem. "Well, I p'ay to my 'Vine Marster, ef ebber I go out'n my lunacies, I may 'maginate myse'f to be de Bresiden' an' not a murderer!"

"I feel sure that Mr. Harcourt's recent sorrow, acting on a mind already unsettled, has increased his malady, and led to this strange delusion. But, notwithstanding his self-accusation, he will be perfectly vindicated," confidently asserted Roma Fronde.

"Lo-r-r-r' grant it, for His sake," fervently prayed the old negro, putting his palms together, and lifting his eyes in the most earnest and reverential manner.

"I suppose Mr. Harcourt has been sent to Ceciltown, the county seat?" said the lady.

"Yes, ma'am; dere's w'ere dey took him."

"I shall go there to see him early to-morrow morning. I should go this evening, if there were a possibility of my being admitted at so late an hour as it would be when I should reach Ceciltown."

"No, ma'am, 'twouldn't be no use to go to-night, noways."

"Have the boat ready to take me across to Snowden by seven o'clock in the morning, then, Jerusalem."

"Yes, dat I will, ma'am, punct'al by seben or by six, or earlier, if so yo' wish, ma'am. Yes, ma'am, yo' may 'pen' 'pon me."

"Now, Jerusalem, go and get your supper, as I fear you have had but little to eat to-day."

"Nuffin but ginger horse cakes, free fo' two cents, youn' mist'ess," said 'Rusalem, as he bowed himself out.

In an instant he bowed himself in again, and said:

"On'y come to 'sho' you, ma'am, as I sartinly hab dat boat ready on time."

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"I am quite sure that you will. Good-night," said Miss Fronde, in an unmistakable tone of dismissal.

"Good-night to yo'se'f, youn' mist'ess."

And 'Rusalem bowed himself out again.

And Roma Fronde, freed from the old man's presence, dropped her head upon her desk in a collapse of mute despair.

She had thought that she had already suffered all that it was possible to bear on poor, mad Will Harcourt's account. But this now seemed the very worst of all—the climax of ills, an undreamed-of woe.

So she sat with her arms thrown out over the desk and her head bowed upon them, motionless, until she felt a pair of little hands steal around her neck, and a pair of soft lips touch her cheeck.

She raised her head and saw, as she had expected to see, little Owlet.

"Don't, Lady! don't look so dreadful!" she pleaded.

Roma passed her arm around the child's waist and drew her to her side, but uttered not a word.

"Is it Mr. William, who was so good to me, who is in prison, Lady?" softly inquired Owlet.

"Yes, darling," came the low, sad tones of the lady.

"He never did nothing to be sent to prison for."

"No, Catherine; certainly not."

"Then what did they send him for?"

"It was a mistake. But it will all come right."

"You said you were going to see him to-morrow, didn't you?"

"Yes, dear."

"Will you take me with you? I do love him so much. I do want to hug and kiss him, and tell him I know he never did nothing that was a sin. Will you take me to see him, Lady?"

"Yes, I will take you, dear. I feel sure he would be glad to see you," said Roma, fondly kissing the child.

"See, Lady. Poor Titus is crying. Speak to him, Lady," said Owlet.

Miss Fronde looked around, and saw the boy with his knuckles in his eyes.

"What is the matter, Titus?" she inquired.

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"Oh, mum, I'm so—so—sorry for the gent, 'specially as he were a friend of yourn, mum," said the lad, with a sob.

"There, there. Don't cry, my boy. It will do no good. Learn self-control, Titus. It is one of the most valuable powers boy or man can possess. Have you done your sum?"

"Yes, mum; and proved her. She's all right, mum, she is," said the boy, forgetting his grief in his pride, rising and bringing the slate to his teacher.

"Yes, it is quite correct. You are getting on very well, indeed. To-morrow I will put you in compound addition. Now, go and take your walk on the beach before it grows too late."

"Yes, mum. Thanky, mum. Will Miss Catherine come, too?" inquired the boy.

Miss Fronde looked down at the child, who had nestled closely to her bosom.

But Owlet answered for herself, and somewhat indignantly:

"You are not possessed of common sense. Do you think that I would leave Lady now for all the walks and all the beaches in the world, you boy?"

Miss Fronde had really intended to send the child also out for a "constitutional;" but, of course, she could not do so now.

"Come in at sunset, Titus. Do not stay out a moment later," she said.

"Yes, mum; I'll do jus' as you say," replied the boy, as he ducked and went out.

Owlet wound her arms around Roma's neck, and said:

"I will never go away from you, Lady; never no more."

Miss Fronde gathered her closer to her bosom, and whispered:

"I hope not, dear. I wish never to part with you."

No more was said between them then. She held Owlet close to her heart, until the child went to sleep.

Then she arose, lifted Owlet in her strong arms, and

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bore her upstairs to her bedchamber, undressed her and put her into the bed. During that process Owlet had half awakened once or twice, half embraced "Lady," and dropped off to sleep again.

Roma returned to her sitting room, took up the forgotten mail bag and turned out its contents.

There was nothing requiring immediate attention; only a few business circulars, a few newspapers and one magazine.

She pushed them all aside, and sat down in her chair to reflect.

Her thoughts still revolved around the one sad central idea, that Harcourt's brain was affected.

How could it be otherwise, she asked herself, when all his actions since that severe brain fever had been so inconsistent with his established character? Ah! that fatal brain fever! brought on by such severe self-tasking and heroic self-denial! by overwrought mind and undernourished body.

Now she must do all that was possible to help him in his need. She must telegraph to her friend and attorney to come down at once and give her the benefit of his advice and assistance in engaging the best counsel the State could supply for the defense of Will Harcourt, in case of necessity, though she scarcely believed he would be brought to trial.

She wondered, indeed, how an insane man, such as she considered Will Harcourt to be, could ever have been committed to prison on his own mad self-accusation of such a terrible crime, especially when the testimony taken by the coroner's jury that sat upon the case of Nathan Yelverton's sudden death was suicide, and could not by any possibility have been a murder.

Yes, even if he should be brought to trial, it would be very easy to clear him.

But afterward?

What would become of poor, insane Will Harcourt?

Ah! what a blighted life! Blighted, not by sin, but by too ardent ambition! overwork! overstudy!

Oh, woe! what could she do for her beloved?

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She could not marry an insane man; but she could and she would take care of him all the days of his life, even as though he were her own invalided brother. Upon that course of action she was firmly determined.

Having settled this question in her own mind, and knowing the great need of keeping up her strength, she arose and went up to her chamber and retired to bed, even though she felt sure that she should not sleep.

And she did not. She lay awake, indeed, all night, mentally going over and over her plans again and again with vain repetition, but restraining her physical restlessness, lest she should disturb the rest of the child sleeping by her side.

So the night passed and morning came.

The faintest flush of earliest daylight was reddening the eastern horizon, when Roma, wide awake, but very quiet, felt little Owlet steal very softly out of bed, evidently with the wish to avoid disturbing Lady.

Roma spoke to the child.

"I am awake, darling."

Owlet instantly flew around to the other side of the bed, and warmly embraced and kissed her Lady.

"But was it true?" she asked.

"Was what true, my dear?" inquired Miss Fronde.

"That about Mr. William."

"Yes, dear."

"Being sent to prison?"

"Yes, Owlet."

"But he never did nothing to be sent to prison for."

"No, darling; and we will soon have him out," said Miss Fronde, as she stepped from her bed and began her morning ablutions.

Little Owlet was dressing her own self, as was the independent young woman's custom.

When both were ready, they went downstairs, to the smaller parlor, where they found the table set.

Roma rang for breakfast to be brought. And promptly 'Rusalem appeared with the large tray in

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his hand, and began to arrange the coffee, cakes and other edibles on the table.

"I has got de big yowboat all yeady down to de beach, youn' mist'ess, an' I s'pose yo'll leabe dat youn' w'ite boy, Titus, wot say he can yow, to help me, as it is de fo'o'd boat."

"Yes, of course. Titus shall go. Where is the boy?" inquired Miss Fronde.

"Down at de fishin' lan'in', helpin' de men to haul de seine. Dat boy c'azy 'bout fishin'."

"Go call him in to his breakfast," said the lady.

'Rusalem went on his errand, and Titus soon came in, took off his cap and said:

"Good-mornin', mum! Good-mornin', miss," with his very best bow, put his cap on a stand and came and took his seat at the table.

Miss Fronde and Owlet had returned his salutations kindly.

Titus was really a very clean and well-behaved boy, and though his speech still showed signs of his neglected education, yet even that was improving every day.

He was very attentive at the table in passing dishes, and in anticipating the wants of the lady and the child with whom he breakfasted.

As soon as the meal was over, Roma said:

"If you feel able to do so, Titus, you shall go with us to Snowden, to help to row the boat."

"Oh, yes, mum! I'm jolly able—which I meant to say, I am quite able to row, thank you, mum," said the lad.

"There never was a Washington boy over ten years old who did not know how to row," said Miss Fronde. "Did you ever have much practice?"

"Oh! yes, mum. I used to row in boats with other boys on the Potomac and Anacostia both. Uncle 'Rusalem asked me if I could help him row the big boat, and I told him 'I should smile,' which I meant to say, mum, of course I could help him."

"Very well, then, my boy. Meet us down on the beach, in a quarter of an hour from this time," said

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Miss Fronde, as she beckoned Owlet to follow her, and went upstairs to get ready for their trip.

In five minutes both came down again.

They had walked down to the beach, where there had been no wharf since the memorable storm of the last autumn had carried off the old one.

The boat was drawn up on the sands.

Roma and Owlet stepped in, and 'Rusalem and Titus pushed the boat off upon the water, jumped in, took the oars, pushed it further out, and began to row rapidly toward the shore.

But it took them forty minutes to reach Snowden.

There were but few people about the wharf, and these were chiefly boatmen and fishermen.

They were all talking of the same sensational occurrence—the committal of William Harcourt to the county jail on the charge of murdering Nathan Yelverton, so long supposed to have committed suicide on the Isle of Storms.

"And he was the very young fellow," said one, "as borrowed my Tommy's boat, and wanted to pay him two dollars for the use of it for a few hours. But I wasn't going to let the little chap have more than fifty cents for it. No, sir. I don't intend to learn my lad to be an extortioner."

"Wasn't he the same young man who used to be clerking over on the island yonder with Tom Todd last season?" inquired another.

"Course he was. I knew him the very minute I see him come out of the squire's office in custody of Constable Bean. I've seen him hundreds of times when I used to carry truck to the island while he was there," said yet another.

Miss Fronde stepped ashore, leading the child by the hand, in the midst of all this gossip, of which she only heard the quoted fragments.

She turned to the oldest and most respectable-looking of the men—Tommy's father—and inquired:

"Can you tell me how far it is to Ceciltown, the county seat, and how I can most quickly reach there?"

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"Yes, miss. But, beg pardon, miss; you are the new lady of the island property?"

"Yes." said Miss Fronde. "And I presume you think it very strange that I should not know all about our own county seat. But, the truth is, I only know its name. I am almost a stranger here."

"To be sure, miss. Well, Ceciltown is just twenty miles from here, right on the line of the railroad, and all the trains stop there."

"Can you tell me when the next train leaves Snowden?"

"At nine o'clock, miss. You have more than an hour to wait if you are to go by it. Plenty of time to catch it, even if you foot it all the way from here to the depot," said her informant.

"Thank you," said Miss Fronde.

Then turning to her own rowers, she said:

"Remain here in charge of the boat until we return from Ceciltown. You had better row around to some shady spot, for the day is going to be warm."

Then taking Owlet by the hand again, she started, preferring, as they had plenty of time, to walk the mile between the steamboat wharf and the railway depot rather than call either at Harrison's Hotel or a livery stable to hire a carriage.

It was but a few minutes after eight o'clock, and the day had not yet grown unpleasantly warm.

The lady and the child walked on until the sandy road—leading from the water side, and flanked by its small farms, cottage gardens and villa lawns, with their buildings in the background—gradually merged into the village street, built up on the right and left with rows of small, wooden houses, some with small shops, and all towered over by Harrison's, which loomed on the left-hand side as you come from the shore. On through the village street they walked until it passed into the inland road, leading between woods, fields and orchards, and finally to the railway depot, which was situated on its left side.

They had plenty of time still before them.

Roma went to the office window and secured their

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tickets; then she went to the telegraph office connected with the depot, and sent the following dispatch:

"SNOWDEN, May 17, 187—.

"To AMOS MERRITT, Attorney at Law, Louisiana Avenue, Washington City, D. C.: Come to me as soon as possible. W. E. H. is in custody, self-charged with the murder of N. Y. Mad, of course.

R. G. F."

By the time she had seen the wires at work on this message the train came rushing into the depot and stopped.

Roma led her little companion up into the car, found seats, and was soon being whirled at express speed toward the county town, where Will Harcourt was confined in prison.

CHAPTER IX

"SEEKING JUDGMENT AND A JUDGE"

WHEN the magistrate said to the self-accused man before him:

"I must commit you to wait the action of the grand jury," Harcourt bowed his head and replied:

"It is, of course, what I had reason to expect—what I came here to meet."

The magistrate then gave some instructions to his clerk, who, in a few minutes, filled out a warrant for the committal of William Everard Harcourt to prison, on the charge of the willful murder of Nathan Yelverton, on or about the fifteenth of the last September, in the Crest House of the Isle of Storms.

He passed the document over to the magistrate, who signed and handed it to the constable, saying:

"There is your prisoner, officer—but no irons. He voluntarily surrendered himself to justice. He will go with you quietly, and give no trouble. Yet"—and here the squire paused to think of the doubtful sanity

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of the man before him, and of the doubtful moods of the insane, and then said: "Perhaps Perry had better be of the escort."

This was no part of the young clerk's duty, yet he liked nothing better than to go upon it; so in five minutes more Will Harcourt, after bowing to the magistrate as if he was taking leave of a friend in a drawing room, walked out of the office, a prisoner, between the constable and his aid.

Now, how had the news escaped that something very unusual was going on before Squire Kilgour?

Had the gossiping host of Harrison's Hotel divulged it, or had the young clerk talked about it when he went to his dinner, or had the villagers "evolved it out of their inner consciousness?"

No one could tell.

But, at any rate, when the trio appeared on the sidewalk, they found a little crowd on the pavement ready to push into the office, but halting at sight of the prisoner.

Several voices demanded at once what was the matter, and what the man in custody had done.

And Constable Bean told them shortly, without the least hesitation, that the prisoner was committed on the charge of the willful murder of Nathan Yelverton, who everybody supposed had committed suicide on the Isle of Storms.

There were many in that crowd who recognized the hotel clerk, among them Jerusalem, from the island, who had followed the procession to the squire's office. But Harcourt saw none of these. He walked with his eyes fixed on the ground.

The tragedy on the Isle of Storms was still fresh in the memory of all, and the crowd followed the two as far as the railway depot, where Bean and Perry, with their charge, boarded a train that had just come up, and that was just about to start again.

No news of the affair had reached the passengers in that train, so that Harcourt was spared the annoyance of being observed, gazed on and talked of.

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A run of forty-five minutes brought them to the little depot at Ceciltown.

They were the only passengers who got off.

This depot, like that of Snowden, was a short distance from the town, and nearer the group of county buildings, comprising the courthouse, the jail, the workhouse and the almshouse.

"This is a duty I always hate to do, especially in the case of a gentleman," said Constable Bean, sympathetically.

"Why especially in the case of a gentleman? Is not liberty as dear to the poor and ignorant man as to the rich and educated, and dear, because the first may be supposed to have mental resources to lighten solitude, while the last has little or nothing of the kind?" said Harcourt.

The constable did not reply, but turned and looked at his prisoner, whom he had expected to see downcast and despondent, but whom, to his surprise, he saw calm and cheerful.

In fact, Will Harcourt was beginning to experience a strange, happy reaction, which he had not expected and did not understand. A great burden seemed lifted from his bosom, a great darkness had passed away from his spirit, leaving a new sense of light and liberty.

He knew that he was really on his way to prison, and that he would probably never be free again so long as he should live, but somehow he did not realize the fact, while he felt that his soul was freed.

The constable, who had turned to him to utter a few words of sympathy, or even of apology, was struck dumb at the sight of his prisoner's cheerful serenity.

"Well!" that officer said, later, to a friend, "I have taken many a man, both high and low, and many a woman, too, both white and black, and some have been sullen, and some have been sorrowful, others have been profane, and a few have been violent, but this young fellow was different from any I ever had to deal with. He came along with us just as cheer-

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ful and contented as if he had been going to see his girl and knew it was all right there."

Ten minutes' walk brought the party to the front of the jail.

It was not a model prison, nor even a very modern one. It stood in the center of a square yard of about a quarter of an acre of ground, surrounded by a six-foot wall of solid masonry, defended all around the top with sharp, iron spikes. In the center of the front wall was a double, iron-bound, oaken door.

The party of three paused here.

The constable pulled an iron knob, connected by an iron chain running through an underground groove with the main building.

A keeper in uniform came and unlocked, unbolted and unbarred the gate. As locks creaked, bolts grated, chains rattled and bars fell, the harsh sounds gave the unaccustomed hearer a realistic sense of what confinement in a county jail must mean.

The constable, followed by the clerk, led his charge through the massive gateway, up the flagstone walk, flanked on each side by a deeply grass-grown lawn, shaded by a few widely scattered, great forest trees, oak, elm and poplar, toward the prison.

This was a huge, oblong, two-storied stone building, with a basement and attic, a peaked roof, four stacks of chimneys at the four corners, and four rows of small, square, grated windows in the front.

The interior was divided into four departments, or wards, by the central halls above and below that ran from front to rear.

On the first floor was the male prison. The division on the right side of the hall as you entered being assigned to the white males, and that on the left to the blacks.

The second floor was the female prison, assigned in like manner, the division on the right to the whites and that on the left to the blacks.

The basement and attic to the domestic offices and officers of the institution.

The constable led his charge up to the massive, iron-

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bound, oaken door in the middle of the front wall, and jerked another iron knob that started another loudly clanging iron bell.

Another keeper unlocked, unbolted and unbarred the door, and again locks creaked, bolts grated, chains rattled and bars fell, with a resounding clatter and bang, as he

"Made the entrance free."

The constable led his prisoner in, followed by his aid, the young clerk, Perry.

Harcourt looked down a long, darksome, gloomy, stone-paved hall, flanked on each side by narrow, grated doors so close together that they suggested the entrance to cages rather than to cells.

But the first door on the right hand was not a narrow grated door, but a substantial oaken one, nor was there any grated door very near it.

The constable rapped at this, and was immediately admitted with his prisoner.

This was the warden's office, plain even to the suggestion of poverty, with whitewashed walls, bare floor, unshaded windows and only a few chairs and a desk by way of furniture.

The warden, a long, lean man, of middle age, with a sallow face and sandy hair and beard, was seated at a heavy, oak writing desk, with a large folio volume open before him. He wore a rusty black business suit.

Three other men were standing before him, with their backs toward the entering party.

Constable Bean, with his charge, remained standing near the door, until the busy warden should be at leisure.

The three men with whom he was at present engaged appeared to be a constable from some other part of the same county, with a colored prisoner, whom he was in the act of delivering over to the custody of the warden, and one of the keepers of the prison, who was waiting to lead the negro to the cell that should presently be assigned to him.

"There! That will do," at length said the warden,

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dropping his pen and lifting his head. "There, take him to 31."

The three men left the office together.

"Now, then, constable! Who have you got there?" demanded the warden, rather impatiently, for he was suffering from both malaria and official worry.

The constable bowed, went up to the desk and silently handed in his warrant.

The warden snatched the document fretfully, and began to run his practiced eyes over the contents. But as he read, his countenance changed, his mouth opened, his chin dropped, his eyes widened.

"Lord bless us! Lord bless us!" he kept on muttering to himself, under his breath. "It is Everard Harcourt's son! Lord bless us! Lord bless us!"

At length he raised his eyes and took a long look at the young man.

Harcourt, in answer to that fixed regard, bowed and smiled, and did not appear to be in the least degree dismayed by the position in which he found himself.

So perfectly free from trouble was his aspect that the warden's countenance changed again from its expression of pained surprise to one of relief and curiosity, and his first words to the prisoner were, to say the least of them, "ex officio:"

"Of course, young gentleman, you will easily clear yourself from this charge, when the time comes."

"I do not think so," replied Will Harcourt.

"He has confessed it, sir, to the magistrate at Snowden," volunteered Constable Bean. "He has given himself up, all of his own accord."

"Lord bless us! Everard Harcourt's son!" again muttered this very unofficial officer.

But the document lying on the table recalled him to business, and he began to put the prisoner through the usual catechism as to his age, occupation, residence and so forth.

Will Harcourt answered all these questions promptly and frankly.

"The son of my old friend, Everard Harcourt,

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Heaven help us!" yet again muttered Warden Miltimore, in an inaudible tone.

But he knew that a warden of jails must not indulge in friendship, sentiment or favoritism among his prisoners, unless he did it very much under the rose, indeed. So he refrained from the least hint that he, Richard Miltimore, had been a schoolmate of the late Everard Harcourt, and one of his groomsmen on the occasion of his marriage.

He wrote out the receipt for the prisoner and gave it to Constable Bean, who took up his hat to go.

"Good-day to you, Mr. Harcourt. I hope to see you well out of this trouble, sir!" he said, as he was leaving the office.

"Thank you. Good-day," responded the young man.

"Though, as he ran his neck into this noose of his own accord, I don't see, for my part, how he is a-going to get it out again. If a man reaches up hand, when he has no call to do it, and pulls down destruction on his own head, he is generally left to perish under the rubbish," soliloquized the constable, rather mixing his metaphors, as he left the building.

The warden then rang a bell that brought a keeper from the hall.

"Take this man to No. 56," he said.

Now, No. 56 was one of the best cages in the jail, being a double cell, in the rear corner, on the same side of the hall with the warden's office. It had the advantage also of two windows, one north, one west, which, though small, square and grated, like the others in the jail, gave a checkered view of the grassy lawn and shady trees from two points, and moreover, a free circulation of air.

Another circumstance for which any friend of the young man might have been very thankful, was that the whole building, with all its fittings, had undergone its annual purification in the spring cleaning, and now smelt of nothing worse than fresh lime.

Harcourt found his cell as clean as a room in a brand-new lunatic asylum, though there was nothing in it but an iron bedstead, with a hard mattress,

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coarse counterpane and straw pillow, one one side, and a rough, wooden bench on the other.

Without a word, the keeper signed for the prisoner to go in, and, when the latter had done so, shut the door and turned the key upon him.

The deed was done.

Will Harcourt, self-surrendered, self-accused, was in prison, under lock and key, to wait the action of the grand jury.

And yet, he was happier, more at peace with himself, than he had been since that fatal night, when, during a life-and-death struggle between Yelverton and himself, the accidental discharge of the gambler's pistol had sent the soul of that gambler into eternity.

Will Harcourt drew off his coat and hung it on one of the pegs on the wall of his cell, and hung his hat over it.

Then he threw himself full length down on the mattress.

The afternoon sun was low; the level rays glinted through the grates of the west window, and flecked the stone walls of the cell, and cheered him; the west wind came in and fanned his forehead and refreshed him.

He was resting and at peace.

A heavy burden, a great responsibility, was lifted from his soul. What a relief! He had been secretly seeking, through many months, "judgment and a judge," and finding none.

Now his case had gone out of his own hand, and would go into those of wise and honest men, who would hear, study and judge it. And he would submit to their judgment willingly, in spirit, as he would be obliged to do it in body.

Yes, it was with the "sigh of a great deliverance" that he felt that his case had passed from his hands, and would pass into other and better ones.

Will Harcourt, twenty-three years of age, was no "Admirable Crichton," with wisdom beyond his years. He was a youth with very limited knowledge of the world. Had he not been such, he could never have

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been lured into sin and ruin by the sharper, Yelverton; and he would not now have been unaware that judges are not invariably wise, nor juries exceptionally honest. But he thought so now, and, therefore, the certainty that his case had passed from his own keeping to theirs gave him a sense of relief and peace such as he had not known for many months.

He lay in a restful, dreamy state until the sun went down, and one of the keepers came into the hall and lighted the gas jets that hung from the ceiling about midway down the corridor.

A few minutes later the same keeper came to the cell door, unlocked it and entered with a tray in his hands, saying:

"Mr. Miltimore has sent you supper from his own table."

And he set the tray down on the wooden bench and left the cell.

Harcourt, knowing nothing of the warden's long past friendship for, and lifelong remembrance of, his deceased father, thought this attention as strange as it was kind.

He had eaten nothing since he had taken his cup of coffee at Harrison's early that morning, and one good result of the healthy reaction from intense remorse and anxiety into peace and resignation was that nature began to assert herself, and to make him hungry.

He really relished the tea and toast, ham and eggs sent him by the warden.

He finished his repast and lay down again, and soon peace passed into rest, and rest into dreamless sleep.

Half an hour later the keeper came down the corridor, on his last round of inspection before giving up the place to the night watchman.

He re-entered Harcourt's cell, found him sleeping, and, without waking him, took away the empty dishes, wondering at their emptiness, saying afterward to the night watchman, as he passed:

"This is the rummest prisoner that ever I had

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charge of! In for willful murder, if you will believe me, and sure to be hung, because he has confessed it. And if you believe me, he ate a hearty supper, of which the warden, of course, sending it from his own table, sent more than enough—and 'cleared the platters,' as the saying is. Look at them. And now he is sleeping as quiet as a child! And you know what them prisoners is mostly like. I don't understand it."

The keeper was right. Harcourt was enjoying the first sound, healthy, dreamless sleep he had known since the tragedy of the Isle of Storms. This dreamless sleep lasted until long after midnight, and passed into visions of Roma, the star, the queen, the angel of his life.

There was nothing that he could distinctly remember of these bright visions, when they were rudely broken by the grating of the key in the rusty lock, the opening of the door and the voice of the keeper; but the impression left was a tranquil and happy one.

"Do you want to wash your face?" facetiously inquired the keeper, for the rules of the prison left no choice with the prisoners to wash or not to wash.

"Well," said Harcourt, coming instantly out of his dreams to the realization of facts, and answering the questioner in the spirit of the question:

"To wash my face in the morning is a habit in which I have long indulged, and we are all slaves of habit, you know."

"Well, then, the washroom is below. Come along."

Harcourt arose, drew on his coat and followed his conductor through a grated door opposite his own cell, and which seemed to belong to another cell, but which really opened upon the head of a flight of stone stairs leading to the basement.

When Harcourt left his cell he found himself at the foot of a little procession of his fellow prisoners in that ward, who were all going down to the washroom under surveillance of the keepers.

The washroom was a stone chamber, flanked on one

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side with a long row of sink basins with spigots above them and roller towels behind them.

Harcourt made his toilet as well as he could, under the circumstances, and followed the procession upstairs and went back into his cell, as the others did to theirs.

He noticed a man with a handbarrow piled with tin dishes, filled with something that smelt like salt fish, and with a large, tin kettle and a number of tin mugs, going the round of the cells, and distributing the tin dishes, and filling and dispensing mugs of coffee. This, of course, was the breakfast of the prisoners served in their cells.

"The warden will send your breakfast from his own table," said the keeper to Harcourt.

"But why should this difference be made between me and my fellow prisoners?" inquired Harcourt.

"I don't know. It is the warden's affair, not mine."

"But I don't understand."

"No more do I, unless he is a friend of yours. You see, the county provides for the victuals of the prisoners, and don't give them no luxuries. Coffee, bread and salt herrin' is what they have got this morning. But if any of the prisoners have got friends to send them anything better, why, they can do it. There is no law agin' that. And if the warden is a friend of yours, of course, he has the same right to send you something better, as any other friend. It ain't at the county's expense."

"But I never saw or heard of the warden in my life, before I came here yesterday afternoon."

"Well, then, maybe he took a liking to you. Anyway, I am to bring your breakfast from the warden's table, as soon as it is ready. The prisoners have their breakfast before the warden's family," said the keeper, as he went out.

Harcourt opened his valise and took out a book. There is so much cant about this book that I hesitate to seem to cant by bringing it in this connection—but it has been the Book of books, to comfort and strengthen poor, suffering humanity from the days of

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Christ to these days of infidelity—the sacred, the blessed, the Divine New Testament.

Harcourt read the Sermon on the Mount. He finished it, and was thinking of it when the keeper reentered the cell with the tray of breakfast in his hands.

Some impulse from some inherited fanaticism of long ago caused Harcourt to feel that it would be almost sacrilegious to eat and even enjoy his breakfast after reading the Sermon on the Mount—that the two were incongruous. But he was really hungry; and he remembered that, when the multitude had followed the Lord into the desert and were hungry, He performed a miracle to feed them.

So when the keeper placed the tray upon the wooden bench, the young man ate and drank, and was thankful.

The keeper, who had no pressing duties then, remained with him until the meal was finished. As he took up the tray to carry it away, he said:

"You, as well as the others, have the run of the corridor during the day. It is only at night the cell doors are locked. And, besides, between nine and ten in the morning, and between three and four in the afternoon, you can have a walk, of an hour's length, in the grounds."

"Thank you. That will be very acceptable."

The keeper left the cell with the door unlocked, and Harcourt went out into the corridor, and walked up and down for exercise. At the rear end, at right angles with his own cell, there was a large window, grated like the rest, but looking out upon the grounds, and beyond them to the heavy forest. He stood at the window, gazing dreamily into the deep shadows of those woods.

None of his fellow prisoners seemed inclined at this hour to use their freedom of the corridor.

While he was still standing there, the keeper came into the corridor and said that the hour for exercise in the grounds had come.

Harcourt turned around and joined the procession

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that filed out of the front door upon the green and shaded lawn, where they were allowed to disband and saunter among the trees.

Harcourt glanced at his companions. Ah! they were the usual jail set, the refuse, the unfortunate of the world.

Harcourt, though peaceful in spirit, was now feeble in body.

He stretched himself out under one of the trees, and with the canopy of green leaves, the company of twittering birds, and the clear blue and fleecy clouds of the sky above him, rested, and sometimes read, and then reflected on what he had read.

So the hour passed, and then the keeper came and marshaled his prisoners back to their cells.

"The next is the black men's hour," he volunteered to tell Harcourt, "and after that the white women's, and, last of all, the black women's. It takes nearly all day to air the four sets."

Harcourt returned to his cell and lay down.

Half an hour passed. It was drawing on toward eleven o'clock, and the whole corridor was very quiet, when steps were heard coming along the stone floor, accompanied by low voices.

Why did Harcourt's heart start up and beat as if it would have burst through its cage of ribs?

The steps drew nearer, the voices ceased, until that of the keeper, reaching the door, said:

"A lady to see you."

And Roma Fronde, followed by Owlet, entered the cell.

CHAPTER X

HARCOURT AND ROMA MEET

Roma Fronde entered the prison cell, leading little Owlet by the hand.

Harcourt started and stared. His face changed. Its recent calmness fled. Surprise, joy, shame, despair,

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chased like lights and shadows swiftly over it, and left their vestiges in a wild, haggard, agonized look.

The woman, whom he felt that he had wronged as never man wronged woman before—wronged by an act so deeply, darkly, foully treacherous that he himself had called it "a deed without a name"—now stood before him—no Nemesis, no goddess of vengeance—but an angel of mercy, smiling gravely, and holding out her hands to him.

He did not see the child at her side, he saw only Roma Fronde in her supernal loveliness. Pale, and sweet, and grave, and beautiful exceedingly.

Again she smiled, and held out her hands to him.

Ah! what a pang, worse than of death, shot through his heart, and wrung his brow.

"Mad! mad!" she thought, as she gazed on his tortured, writhen, agonized countenance.

It required all her great self-command to maintain her own composure and cheerfulness. Her poor boy! Something even of maternal tenderness entered into this strong woman's love for this unhappy youth.

"Pardon!" he muttered, hoarsely, scarcely able to articulate, dropping his head, lowering his eyes. "Pardon!" and he would have fallen at her feet but that she prevented him.

She took both his hands, and made him sit down on the bench, seating herself beside him.

Owlet solemnly and silently took the place on the other side of him; but he never noticed her, never even saw her.

Roma took his hand in hers and said:

"Now, tell me all about it, Will."

"I am not worthy to speak to you," he groaned, without lifting his head, which was still bowed upon his breast.

"Look at me, Will. Let me see you truly. I came to see you."

"I am too base to raise my eyes to yours."

"Tell me why you think so. Let me judge," she pleaded, with ineffable tenderness.

"I am a wretch too lost to live!" he muttered.

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"Insane! insane!" thought Roma.

"Oh, lady! why do you come here?"

"Because I know that you love me, Will, and need me. That is why I came."

"Why do you not scorn and hate me, rather?" he groaned.

"Because I love you, even as you love me. Because I vowed, before the Lord's altar, in the Lord's house, to take you for better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, until death should part us. And if love did not bring me here, Will, duty would. Whoever thrust himself between you and me in that suddenly darkened church, whoever took my hand and slipped the ring upon it, and made the response, did not receive my vows. They were given to you whom I came there to wed—to you, who I thought stood beside me—and not to the base fraud and thief who stole into your place. My vows were given to you with all my heart and soul, and they have been kept true to you through all the storms and struggles of this last half year."

He groaned, and buried his face in his hands.

"Come, Will; the wall is down from between us now. I have swept it away with a stroke of my arm."

"The arm of an Amazon! The arm of a goddess, physically and spiritually! Oh, Heaven! can you care for me, after all that has passed?"

"Yes, yes; because you need care more than ever."

"And still have some little remnant of faith in me?"

"I have faith in you, and hope for you, Will."

He wrung his hands.

"Oh, Will, did you think when I first gave you my heart, and promised you my hand, that the heart and the hand were given for any less than all time and all eternity? Is a woman's marriage vow to be made only on conditions, subject to contingencies? I gave you mine without reserve, Will Harcourt."

"Roma! Roma!" he cried, in a voice of anguish. "You do not know all! You cannot know all, or you would so hate and scorn me that you would never

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deign to see my face again, or to permit my name to be mentioned in your hearing. I feel like a baser traitor than I was before, to sit here and receive all your gracious words while you know so little of the cause you have to loathe and despise me, to discard and forget me."

"Insane! Insane!" sighed Roma, in the depths of her heart.

He sat with his face buried in his hands.

"Will," she said, at length, "I repeat to you, when we two stood before that altar in the little church in South Washington, and I joyfully pledged love, faith and service to the husband of my heart, it was to you I pledged them, and not to another. It was forever that I pledged them, and not for time. It was unconditionally I pledged them, and not with mental reservations. And through all the cyclone of sorrow and danger that has swept over us, I have 'kept the faith,' and I mean to keep it."

"Oh, Roma! Oh, my queen! If there were nothing behind, and worse! Still, what you know and see should banish me from your presence and from your mind! If there were nothing behind, and worse, here am I, a prisoner under the charge of willful murder."

"A false charge," she said, quietly.

"Roma! I was self-surrendered to justice! Self-accused!"

"But you were never guilty of willful murder."

"No, I was not! But, ah, my queen! How should you know that?"

"How should I know it? By knowing you! Why, Will! You are no more capable of that foul crime than I am!"

"It is true. I am not guilty of murder, or of any intention or inclination to murder. Nor did I accuse myself of that. And yet, on my own representation, I was committed on the charge of willful murder."

"But why should this great injustice have been done?" she inquired, in surprise.

"Beloved," he began, but immediately corrected himself by saying: "Oh, pardon me! I am, indeed,

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unworthy to address you by any endearing name! Only, you see, the heart will take advantage of the mind, and utter itself before it can be stopped."

"But why should you not call me 'beloved,' when I am beloved? When I am the most beloved of all the world to you? I am so sure of that, Will. If I had not been sure of it, I should never have plighted love and faith to you for time and eternity! If I were not just as sure of it now as I was then, I should not now be with you here. Speak to me always from your heart, Will," she said, and held out her hand.

He took it and bowed his forehead upon it, and his tears fell hot and fast.

"You were just going to tell me something of the charge against you, when you interrupted yourself. What was it? Tell me. Tell me everything, Will. Trust me. Trust my love, my faith, my sympathy. Whatever may be the real or imagined trouble, it will be wiser and better for you to talk it over freely and quietly here with me, than to brood over it by yourself," she pleaded.

"Dear love," he murmured, "I was about to tell you, that although my own conscience acquits me of willful murder, it does not acquit me of being the immediate cause of poor Yelverton's tragic death."

"I thought it was suicide."

"So did everybody else. Such was the verdict of the coroner's jury. This was because he was found with the discharged pistol in his death-stiffened hand, in a closed room that had to be broken open, and, so far as the people who found him could judge, with all his property intact. But that pistol which sent the bullet through his brain, was discharged by accident while he was in a deadly struggle with me."

"A deadly struggle with you, Will? How could that possibly have come about?" gravely, anxiously inquired Roma.

"My queen, I have not the courage to confess to you face to face. Face to face to tell you the whole dishonorable story. I wrote it out for you some months ago—as soon, in fact, as I learned of your

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heroic self-deliverance from captivity on the Isle of Storms, because I knew it was your right to be put in possession of the facts. But had you not freed yourself or been in some other way freed from that captivity, I should never have had the right to give you this explanation."

Having said this much, Harcourt went to his valise, opened it, and drew out a voluminous packet, which he brought and placed in the hands of Roma.

"Beloved," he said, in a low, sad tone, "when you have read this, you will know the depth of the abyss into which I fell that night. You will know how, in my desperate struggles to climb out, I fell deeper and still deeper. If, after you have read it all, you should decide that you can never look upon my face again, never permit my name to be uttered in your presence again, I shall not think that you have judged me unjustly or dealt with me harshly. I shall accept your judgment and sentence, as I shall accept all the pains and penalties of my position."

She took the packet in silence, but with a look more eloquent than words, a look which said:

"Whatever this packet may reveal, it cannot touch my love or faith."

Further conversation was interrupted by the entrance of the keeper, with a large tray of dinner from the warden's table. Simultaneously was heard the trundle of the handbarrow, carrying the county's provender to the other prisoners.

"You see, I have found a friend in the warden of this prison," said Harcourt, with a faint smile.

"I shall thank him forever," said Roma, as she arose to go.

"You are leaving me?" said Harcourt.

"Yes; it is best for me to go now. But I shall return to-morrow. In the meantime, do not wrong me by a doubt as to the result of my reading this manuscript. I shall read it to-night before I sleep. And I shall return it, in person, to-morrow. Good-by. God bless you, dear Will," she said, offering him her hand.

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He took it, bowed his forehead upon it, and then released it with a profound sigh, murmuring:

"I would I were worthy to return the sweet benediction. To say, God bless you, my angel."

"Good-by, Mr. William," exclaimed Owlet, speaking for the first time since her entrance into the cell. "I did think you might be glad to see me for the sake of old times, you know. But you have not said one word to me since here I have been."

"My dear, little Owlet, I am sorry; but, you know, I was seriously engaged," he answered, with a slight smile.

"Alas!" exclaimed Owlet, using an ejaculation she had heard on the stage, and thinking it appropriate to the present grave occasion. "Alas! I am afraid you are not possessed of common sense."

"I am very much afraid that I never was largely endowed with that useful commodity," said Harcourt, with a slight smile.

"Well, then, why don't you get some from Lady? She has enough for both of you. She will spare you some of hers, if you will only take it. Good-by, Mr. William."

"Good-by, little Owl. Will you give me a kiss?" he asked, holding out his hand to draw her toward him.

"No," she replied.

"What! Not give me one little kiss before we part?"

"No."

"But why?"

"'Cause I don't think it's proper for a young man to kiss a young girl," said Owlet, severely.

"Oh, my goodness gracious! I humbly beg your pardon for my indiscretion, madam," said Harcourt, with much solemnity.

"There you are again!" exclaimed Owlet. "If I have told people once, I have told them a thousand times, that I am not a married woman. And yet they keep on calling me madam. I'm disgusted with life."

"They address you thus in deference to your supe-

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rior wisdom, Mademoiselle Nouvellini," said Harcourt, gravely.

"You are not possessed—— But I told you that before. And it don't do a bit of good. Line on line and things don't have any 'fect on some people. Good-by, Mr. William."

"Good-by, Miss Catherine."

Roma approached Harcourt again, and said:

"I have telegraphed for Mr. Merritt to come down and consult with us on the subject of engaging counsel for you. He knows every eminent member of the Maryland bar. He may come by train, and arrive to-night. If so, shall I show him your statement?"

"Read it first, dear Roma. And then act upon your own judgment. I thank you, dear, more than I can now say, for your thoughtful kindness in sending for Merritt."

"Good-by."

"Good-by."

Roma took the hand of little Owlet and led her out of the cell.

She went straight to the warden's office, which was on the same side of the corridor with Will Harcourt's narrow cell. It was a large front room near the prison door. Roma had been there once before on that morning, when she asked to see Mr. Harcourt.

A keeper stood on duty at that end of the corridor, ready to open the front door or the office door to any applicant.

"Will you kindly go in and ask the warden if he will be so good as to give me an interview of a few moments?"

"Certainly, mum," politely replied the officer, and went on his errand. No stranger ever addressed our stately Juno as "Miss." That impertinent little monosyllable did not seem to suit; neither did "Mum," but it was the keeper's corruption of "madam."

Presently the tall, thin, pale-faced, red-haired, ague-stricken warden came out, bowed with old-fashioned formality, and inquired:

"What else can I do for you, Miss Fronde?"

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"Will you please give me a few minutes' conversation, Mr. Miltimore?"

"Certainly, with pleasure. Come into this room, if you please, Miss Fronde; my office is scarcely the proper place to invite a lady to enter. It is subject to rude invasions of constables and criminals at any hour. This is the sheriff's room, where prisoners meet their counsel. It is unoccupied at this moment."

And he opened the door of an apartment directly opposite his office. The walls were freshly whitewashed, the floor freshly scrubbed. A long oak table in the middle of the room and several wooden chairs comprised all the furniture.

The warden placed a chair for Roma, and with a formal bow, took another near her.

"First, I have to thank you, with all my heart, for your great consideration and kindness to Mr. Harcourt. He is guiltless of the charge upon which he was committed, as will be shown when his case goes before the grand jury."

The warden bowed again. He was an old-fashioned Marylander, and good at bowing—to ladies. He was too polite to remind this lady that the prisoner had been committed on his own confession. He replied only to the first sentence of her speech, and said:

"It was my duty to show every attention to Mr. Harcourt consistent with my responsibilities here. His father, the late Everard Harcourt, and myself were schoolfellows at Charlotte Hall College together. He was a rich boy, and had plenty of pocket money. I was a poor boy, and he shared all his 'tips' with me. We were at that simple age, or perhaps had naturally the simple minds to which giving does not mean condescension, nor accepting humiliation. At least he made me think so. I was a dull boy, and he was a smart one, and he used to help me with my exercises, and by his explanations make me understand them, and when I lamented my dullness, he would say: 'Miltimore, my boy, you are the soul of truth, honesty and affection, and that is more than I am always, and better than to be a Newton in intellect.' But it was

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not, Miss Fronde, for he was all he described me to be, and he had a master mind besides. Well, he was also a strong boy, and I was a weak one, and would have been put upon by our thoughtless schoolmates, but that he fought all my battles. And, oh, how he would strike out from the shoulder was a sight to me. And then, when I was ashamed of my weakness, he would again restore my self-respect by saying: 'Miltimore, my friend, moral strength is better than physical strength, and you have more moral strength than all these young bullies put together.' But I am wearying you, Miss Fronde, with all these reminiscences."

"Oh, no, indeed, you are not! It gives me pleasure to hear these details of William Harcourt's father."

"After we left college, he returned to his home, and I opened a day school, and we lost sight of each other for some years, when at last I was surprised by receiving a letter from him, inviting me to be his groomsman. I got a substitute for the school, and went to that pleasant duty. But that happy occasion was the last in which I ever saw the face of my friend, who fell in battle while gallantly fighting under Gen. Lee, but who lives in my memory as the purest, bravest, most loyal man I ever had the honor to know. All that I can do for his son, consistent with my duties here, I shall do, as in payment or part payment of a sacred debt that can never be completely discharged. Miss Fronde, I am tiring you with this lengthy story."

"Oh, indeed no! Everything relating to William Harcourt's family is deeply interesting to me. I am betrothed to him," said Roma, gravely.

"Ma'am?" inquired the warden, looking as if he did not understand her last words.

"William Harcourt and myself are engaged to be married—have been engaged for two years, and should have been united before this, but for untoward circumstances which it is not necessary to enter into," Roma explained.

"Ah, indeed!" exclaimed the warden, astonished,

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first at the fact of the engagement itself, and then at the stranger fact that any young lady should venture to acknowledge such an engagement to a man committed to prison under the charge of willful murder.

But then, Roma Fronde was certainly not "any young lady." Very far from it. She was a very exceptional young lady.

"Yes," she quietly replied. "Therefore, you see, I have almost a wife's right to take the deepest interest in his well being, and to do all I can to ameliorate his condition."

"Certainly—certainly," assented the warden, and his astonishment gave place to pleasure in the thought that the unfortunate son of his honored old friend was beloved by and engaged to this peerless woman, as she seemed to him.

"Then can I be permitted to make some improvements in the furniture and fittings of his cell?" she inquired.

"Of course. Any—that is, any that the narrow place will admit of. You may paper the walls and carpet the floor, if you please, and put in all the comfortable fixings it will hold, and I can give the young man another cell while the job is going on. It need only take a day, from morning until evening."

"Thank you," said Roma, smiling, "but I certainly do not wish to paper the walls. Fresh whitewash is so much more wholesome than any paper in so narrow a place. But I will send in some furniture to-day if you will be so good as to have it put in place."

"With pleasure, Miss Fronde. When you come again, you shall find it so."

"I will come again to-morrow, and every day, while my betrothed husband remains here," said Roma.

"And to-morrow you shall find everything you send put in place."

"Thank you very much," said Roma, cordially.

And she would have liked to place a sum of money

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in the hands of the warden for Will Harcourt, but as his meals were regularly sent from the warden's table in acknowledgment of the warden's indebtedness to his prisoner's father, and in gratitude to the latter, Roma though that to offer funds for such a purpose might seem to reflect on the warden's bill of fare. So she refrained, and bade Mr. Miltimore good-day, after again thanking him for all his kindness to Harcourt.

But the polite warden attended her to the great front door, where the keeper was on duty.

There, with a noisy unlocking, unbolting and unbarring, Roma and her little companion were let out of the prison.

CHAPTER XI

'RUSALEM'S WEAKNESS

"Oh! Whe-e-ew! Now, thanks be to Him, I can get my breath! Oh, Lady, what a place! Oh, my goodness! So much stone and iron and locks and bars and chains I never did see in all my life!" Owlet cried, as they walked down the flagged path leading straight from the strong door of the main building to the strong gate of the wall.

Here, with more unlocking, unbolting, unbarring and unchaining, they were at length let out into the free world.

"Let's walk fast, Lady, and get far away from this howid place!" said Owlet, quickening her own steps, and dragging at her companion.

"Quite right. We must make haste, we have so much to do," Roma said, hurrying on.

When they reached the business section of the main street of the town, Roma stopped at a furniture store, made her purchases, and gave the address to which they were to be sent. Then she went to a dry goods store, selected some articles, and gave the same directions.

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"Now we must really run for it to catch our train," she said, as she left the last-mentioned place.

"Hurrah, Lady! Run me a race!" exclaimed Owlet, excitedly, "and see who will get there first!"

"No, no, that will scarcely do! I must hold your hand, and we must walk as fast as ever we can," replied Miss Fronde, as they hurried on toward the depot. But as they neared it they heard the roar and rush of the coming train.

"And now we really shall have to run, though not a race!" exclaimed Roma, and tightly clasping her companion's hand, they sped on to the depot, and just arrived in time to jump on the train that came panting up, but never stopped more than twenty seconds.

"If we hadn't had return tickets, we should have got left, shouldn't we, Lady?" said Owlet, as she settled herself snugly in the seat beside her benefactress.

"We certainly should," Roma replied.

"And you got them on purpose to make sure."

"Yes, dear."

"Oh, what a thing it is to be possessed of common sense!" murmured Owlet to herself, as she subsided into quietness.

Roma fell into deep thought over the occurrences of the day.

She had gone to the prison that morning, expecting to find a lunatic in her betrothed, and all his utterances during the first ten minutes of her visit served to confirm her expectations. But after that his partial explanations had shaken her judgment of his condition. Her mind was full of painful doubts. The packet she held in her hand would solve them in some way, she thought, and she would read it and know the worst before she should sleep the coming night. And whatever it might reveal, she would be true to the unhappy youth, who did all he could to expiate his sin—if he had sinned—by giving himself up to justice, when he might have lived free and unsuspected all his life.

Owlet broke into her reverie.

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"Lady," she murmured, in a low tone, so that their fellow passengers should not hear her, "I am so glad you are 'gaged to Mr. William. I 'prove of it."

"Do you, dear?" inquired Roma, sadly smiling.

"'Deed I do! I re'mended Mr. William to marry you, when we was on the cars coming to Washington."

"Oh, you did!"

"Yes; 'cause, you see, I didn't know you was 'gaged a'ready."

"And what did he say?"

"He never said nothing. I reckon he was laughing inside of himself to think I was re'mending him to marry you, when he was 'gaged to you a'ready, and I didn't know it! But it was queer, wasn't it?"

"Very queer altogether."

"And he never told me! He might have told me, seeing I was such a friend of the family."

"Pure, fresh, mixed candies!" shrieked the confectionery fiend, crying his sweet poisons through the car.

Roma was grateful for once for the sound of this discordant scream. It saved her having to reply to Owlet.

But when the spirit of dyspepsia had passed, Owlet resumed the subject. Roma was not to be let off so easily.

"When are you going to be married, Lady?"

"I do not know, dear."

"Well, that is queerer than the other," said Owlet, very thoughtfully. Then: "I should like to be first bridesmaid on that 'casion, lady."

"So you shall be, dear; only bridesmaid," said Roma, "when I am bride," she added, dubiously.

"But won't you have a grand wedding, with ever so many bridesmaids, all in white satin, with long trains and long veils and flowers?"

"No, dear. Where did you ever see such a wedding as that?"

"Oh, in a church mamma took me to once. I forgot where it was and who was married."

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The conductor came down the car to collect the tickets.

Roma gave up hers and Owlet's, and then sat back and looked out of the window. She did not continue the conversation upon weddings with little Owlet. Neither did she wish to repel the child, so she looked out of the window, and seemed to be interested in the deep forest through which the railroad passed.

Owlet, perhaps divining her Lady's mood, settled herself back in her seat, and only murmured:

"Ah! if it only pleased the Lord that Mr. William was along of us now, I could be completely happy."

It was the peculiarity of Owlet, with her active mind, that when she forced herself to be very quiet, especially in church or on a railway train, she invariably went to sleep. She did so on this occasion, and slept until the train ran into the Snowden station, just forty minutes after leaving Ceciltown. Then she woke up with a start, and remarked that she believed she had been nodding.

Roma took the child by the hand, left the train, and walked directly to the telegraph office, from which she had sent the dispatch to Mr. Merritt, and where she had left directions that the answer, if any should come, should be retained until she called for it.

As soon as she stepped up to the counter, the operator handed her an envelope.

She tore it open, and found the following answer:

"No. — Louisiana Ave., Washington, D. C.,
"May 26, 187—.

"To Miss Fronde, Isle of Storms, Snowden, Md.: Received your dispatch. Will start by rail to-morrow morning, and reach you at night. Amos Merritt."

"Dear old friend, he never fails me! 'The shadow of a great rock in a weary land'," said Miss Fronde, as she left the office, leading the child.

They walked on so fast that they soon passed

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through the village and out by the sandy road leading to the water side.

There they found 'Rusalem and Titus, with the boat, waiting for them.

"Did you find the time long? Were you very tired?" sympathetically inquired Miss Fronde.

"Oh, no, mum," replied truthful Titus. "We had a jolly good time, me and Uncle 'Ruse."

"How was that?"

"We took it turn and turn about, watching the boat and going to the village."

"Well?"

"You see, mum, when we was watching you and Miss Catherine going up the road to the depot, we happened to see a football match on the common over yonder, and while we was a-looking at it, Uncle 'Rusalem say as how if I would mind the boat true and faithful while he went up to the village to the 'pothecary's shop to get a dose of salts to cure his headache, how he wouldn't be long, and when he come back I might go and see the football match, and maybe the boys would let me play at it. So I said 'Yes,' and Uncle 'Rusalem said: 'All right.' And he went, and I stayed 'long of the boat."

"What next?"

"Uncle 'Rusalem come back in 'bout an hour. Then I went and see the football. And one boy said: 'Want to play?' And I just jumped, and said: 'Yes.' And they all said 'Come on, then.' And they let me play, just like one of themselves. And it was I who kicked the ball highest! And it was just the jolliest racket as you ever see, mum! And we played till the boys broke up and went in to afternoon school. Then I went back to the boat, and found Uncle 'Rusalem sleeping like an angel. And I eat my snack and minded the boat until you and Miss Catherine come up, mum."

Miss Fronde turned and looked at the old negro, who seemed, in fact, as if he had but just partly woke up, and was still confused between dreams and realities.

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But he roused himself under his mistress' regards, and raising his blood-shot eyes to her face, and speaking in a breath redolent of rum, he said:

"Now, youn' mist'ess, doane yo' be too ha'sh wiv a po' ole man. I on'y jus' went to de 'pot'acary's shop to——"

"Jerusalem!" exclaimed Miss Fronde, cutting short his falsehood. "I have not required you to give an account of yourself. You need not tell me anything." And she stepped into the boat, leading little Owlet.

"Titus, loose the boat, take one pair of oars and give me the other pair. We must row. The old man is incapacitated."

The lady and the boy pushed the boat off the sands, and began to row from the shore.

Jersalem sniveled in a maudlin manner.

"Been a fai'ful servin to de Gwine fambly ebber sence I were borned, an' fo', too, 'cause all my prodigies was 'fo' me. An' now to be s'picioned by de chil'en as I has toted on my back an' dand'ed on my knee, yes, an' yobbed birds' nesses fo' an' set yabbit tee-aps fo'!" he whimpered, disregarding the fact that he had never seen the face of Miss Fronde until she arrived on the island on coming of age and into her estate.

"Jerusalem, I fear that your visit to the apothecary's shop has not relieved your head to any great extent. You had best lie down in the bottom of the boat and go to sleep again," she said.

"To be made a mock of by de young gal as I's been a slave to, an' fetched an' carried fo', an' made doll babies' cayidges fo'; an' been a hoss to, an' drawed her yittle wagon, an' let her yide on my back, an' been a dog to! an' a cat! an' a yat to! an' eberyt'ing to! It's hard! It's berry hard lines, in de ole ages ob my pilg'imidge fo' her to say 'Go up, you ball head, go!' She better fink about dem lions as eat up dat prophet, she had," sniveled 'Rusalem, as he sank down to the bottom of the boat, quite helpless.

"What does Uncle Jerusalem mean, Lady?" in-

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quired the perplexed child, who had never in her short, though varied experience—

"Foregathed wi' the de'il"

in the form of an intoxicated man.

"The poor old fellow is thinking of my mother, Catherine, who was a daughter of the house, and to whom, no doubt, he was all that he thinks he was to me," Roma replied.

"But what's the matter with him? He is so awful funny."

"He is not well. His head is not right."

"Oh! That, indeed! But I never saw anybody act so funny in all my life."

"Don't notice him, dear. See, he has gone to sleep."

After this Owlet asked no more questions, and the lady and the boy rowed on in silence for the best part of an hour, for the tide was against them. It was near sunset when they reached the shore.

Miss Fronde and her little henchman pushed the boat aground.

Roma stepped out, leading the child.

Titus secured the boat by a chain to a staple in a post, and then stepped into it again, and tried to rouse 'Rusalem. But to no purpose. He only grunted and muttered about being "mocked by de chil'en as he had been a slave to, an' a hoss to, an' a dog to," and sank after each partial rousing into a heavier sleep than before.

"It's no use, mum! He's dead drunk! I can't rouse him, and I can't lift him!" said Titus, panting with his exertion, as he stood up in despair.

"Then let him alone. I will send his wife to him," said Miss Fronde, taking Owlet by the hand to lead her up the hill.

"Ef you let me, mum. I'd like to stay 'long of the old man till Aunt Wilet comes," said the boy.

"Certainly. It is best that you should. And very kind of you to think of it," said Miss Fronde.

"Belike as I've seen more drunken men in my time,

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mum, than you ever have seen, or ever will see, in the whole of your life. And I know about 'em. And this man might roll and tumble out of the boat and get drowned, you know, mum."

"Might he? He seems very incapable of moving. But stay and take care of him until I send his wife, which I shall do as soon as I reach the house," said Miss Fronde.

She led Owlet up the hill, and soon came to the plateau in front of the house.

She saw Wilet standing on the front porch, waiting for them. She beckoned the woman to come to her.

Wilet ran down the steps and across the lawn and met them.

"I seen de boat come in w'en I was stan'in' at de dinin'-yoom windy, arter I had set de table, an' I came out to watch fo' yo'. How did you fine de youn' ge'man, ma'am?" inquired the woman, who had heard from her husband—all that he would tell her—of Will Harcourt's commitment to prison.

"Not very well or very happy, Violet, of course," replied her mistress.

"Not ef so be he were tuk up fo' killin' ob dat riff-raff, hang-gallows Hanson, w'at teeide to yob him ob his beeide, de judge would be sure to fetch it in, 'Sarve him yight.' Dat he would."

"Violet," said Miss Fronde, somewhat severely, "do you remember promising me never to allude to that subject again?"

"Lor', youn' mist'ess, so I did; but I never meant it."

"Never meant what? Never meant to keep your promise?"

"G'way f'om yere, youn' mist'ess! Yo' know well 'nough as I meant I nebber meant to 'lude to dat subjec' ag'in. Yes, dat w'at I meant, fo' true."

"Then remember to keep your promise after this, and never speak of that affair again."

"All yight, youn' mist'ess. I'll cut my tongue out

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firs'. Well, youn' mist'ess, de dinner's yeady to go on de table w'en yo's ready fo' it."

"I am not ready yet. And now, Violet, I wish you to go down to the boat and see after your husband. He is not able to walk up the hill. Titus is with him, and will help you to bring him to the house."

"Now, w'at's de matter long o' 'Rusalem?" demanded Wilet, none of her fears but all her suspicions aroused by Miss Fronde's news. "He were well 'nough w'en he lef' yere dis mornin'. Now, youn' mist'ess, tell me true. Has dat fursuk ole idlit been jinkin'?"

"I am sorry to say that he has, Violet," regretfully acknowledged Miss Fronde.

"Oh! won't I dislypline him fo' dat!" wrathfully exclaimed his wife.

"The day was warm, you know, and the man was old, and he had long to wait. Do not be too harsh with him," said her mistress.

"Now, ma'am, doane yo' go makin' no 'scuses fo' dat ole sinner—doane. I done beeoke him ob jink once, an' now he's done started ag'in—'sgracin' hisse'f 'fo' strangers! Nebber mine! I'll dislypline him! I'll gib him gittin' junk! I'll make him wish he'd nebber seed jink, nor yet heerd tell ob it!"

"You had better keep your temper, and go and bring the old man home, Violet," said Miss Fronde, very gravely.

"Oh, I'll go! Oh, I'll fotch him; an' I'll make him fink de debble had fotched him, 'stead ob me!" said Wilet, furiously.

"Violet!" exclaimed her mistress.

"Oh, ma'am, yo' wait till yo' gits a jinkin' beas' ob a husban, an' den pass yo' judgmen' onto me," retorted the fierce creature, as, spurred on by indignation, she scurried down the cliff, at the imminent risk of life and limb.

Miss Fronde led the child into the house. Not that that independent, little, old woman needed any leading at all, but that she liked to cling to her Lady, who permitted her to do so.

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They went upstairs to Miss Fronde's room, laid off their hats and wraps. Each had the refreshment of a bath and a change of clothes, and then went down to the dining room.

They found the table set, the lamps lighted, and Titus waiting anxiously.

"What is the matter, Titus?" she inquired.

"Oh, mum, I am so sorry for poor Uncle 'Rusalem."

"What has happened to him? Anything worse than we know already?"

"Oh, mum, Aunt Wilet is a perfect savidge Injun, and a roaring lion, and no colored lady at all."

"Why, what has she done?" inquired Miss Fronde, with uneasy forebodings.

"Oh, mum, first she tried to wake him up by pulling and hauling and scolding. And when that didn't rouse him, she went away and got a stick, and beat that poor old man 'til he howled. I tried to stop her and to get the stick away from her, but she fetched me a blow that almost broke my back, and arsked me how I dared to interfere between man and wife. And then she made me help her to drag him out of the boat and up the hill to the house, and up the back stairs and put him to bed. And then she locked the door and come down to the kitchen to 'tend to the dinner."

"I am very sorry to hear this, Titus. But go and get yourself ready for dinner, and then join us here," said Miss Fronde, who privately resolved to speak to Wilet on the subject.

After a few minutes the woman entered the room with a tureen of soup in her hands, and set it down on the table, saying:

"I'll hab to be waiter as well as cook to-night, youn' mist'ess. I has jus' had to put dat fursuk ole idlit to bed."

"After giving him a severe beating!" exclaimed Miss Fronde.

"Dat w'ite boy been tellin' tales!"

"He only answered questions put to him. How dared you beat a helpless ole man, Violet?"

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"Lor', youn' mist'ess, I had to dislypline him."

"How will you face your husband to-morrow?" severely inquired Miss Fronde.

"'Ow will I face him! 'Ow will he face me, yo' better ax, youn' mist'ess! 'Ow will he face his own lawful wife, arter comin' home as junk as a juke!"

"You have done very wrong—outrageously! I am in duty bound to tell you so. How dared you so cruelly assault your old husband in his helpless condition?"

"Hi, youn' mist'ess, who's to blame fo' dat? Not me! not Wilet! Who put him in a he'pless edition? Not me! not Wilet! He did it his own se'f!" said the woman, but her voice broke, her high temper was fast subsiding into sorrow.

Miss Fronde saw this, and said:

"I hope and trust, Violet, that this cruel and disgraceful conduct will never be repeated."

Wilet began to cry.

"I did it fo' de bes'," she said. "'Twan't no pleasure to me to lambaste my po' ole man! 'Deed I is sorry now—awful sorry! But I did it fo' his good, I did! He might do it to me, an welkim, ef he catched me junk. But I's awful sorry!" she cried, throwing her apron over her head and burstng into a paroxysm of tears and sobs—in her race the natural outcome of a paroxysm of rage and violence, as rain follows thunder and lightning.

"How will ebber I face my po' ole angel in de mornin', sho' 'nuff?" she sobbed, as the passion of grief subsided.

"Let us hope that he will remember nothing about it when he wakes in the morning," suggested Roma.

"I hopes he won't. Maybe he won't. But den de bruises! But maybe he'll fink he got dem tumblin' bout! Dat is, ef nobody tell him nuffin' 'tall 'bout it."

"Nobody shall tell him. I will warn Titus. Nobody shall humiliate him. And I feel sure you will try to make up to him to-morrow, by great kindness, for the ill-treatment you have given him to-day."

"Yes, youn' mist'ess I will, fo' sho'. I on'y did it

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fo' his good, ef I was in a temper. I wanted to break him ob jink. Oh, Lor' ef I could on'y keep him out'n temptation! But dis yer goin' to de willage!"

"He shall be kept from temptation, Violet. For the future I shall send Titus to the post office and on all my other errands to Snowden."

"Oh, thanky, youn' mist'ess. 'Deed I is mighty bleege to yo' fo' dat frought. But set down to yo' dinner, honey. De soup is gettin' cole."

Titus had entered, unperceived.

Miss Fronde and her two protégés drew to the table.

Wilet waited on them in a very subdued manner until the end of the repast.

Soon after dinner Owlet became very sleepy.

Miss Fronde took her up to bed.

But not until the child was sound asleep did she leave the chamber.

When she went down to her sitting room, she found Titus engaged in lighting the lamps there—"vice" old 'Rusalem, disabled by drink.

"You are a thoughtful and a useful lad, Titus, and I thank you," said Miss Fronde.

"I try to be, mum. And sure, it is my duty to be useful as ever I can be to you, as has been a mother to me, mum," said the boy, with sincere feeling.

Roma did not repudiate the maternal suggestion even in thought.

"Is there anything else I can do for you, mum?" he next inquired.

"No, thank you, Titus."

"Will I stay and keep you company, mum?"

"Not now, my boy. I shall be closely engaged for some hours. You can go to your room and read, or amuse yourself as you will."

"May I go down to the fishing landing to help to lay out the seines for the next hauling, mum?"

"Certainly, Titus, if you wish. But put on your thick jacket, for the air is fresh, and you are not yet strong, and may take cold if you are not careful.

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Be sure to come in by nine o'clock. Old Mr. McMasters has a watch, and will tell you the time."

"Thanky, mum. I'll be sure to do just as you tell me and show myself to you in this room by nine o'clock," said the boy, and with his habitual polite bow, he left the room.

Roma was alone at last.

She drew Will Harcourt's manuscript statement from her pocket, opened and began to read it.

CHAPTER XII

A TERRIBLE REVELATION

Roma Fronde sat reclining in an easy-chair, near an old-fashioned center table, reading by the light of a shaded astral lamp the confession of William Harcourt, her betrothed husband.

Who can imagine the mingled emotions of sorrow, shame and pity which racked her soul as she read this terrible story of temptation, sin and despair?

She had not been in the least degree prepared even by the ominous words of Harcourt for all the amazement, horror and humiliation caused by this statement of facts, told without the least attempt at excuse for the sinner or palliation of the sin.

No! no! no! She had not been prepared for anything approaching this!

Think of it! She had known William Harcourt as intimately as if he had been her own brother for more than two years, and had been engaged to him for eighteen months before the event of his fatal employment as hotel clerk at the Crest House, and all that she had known of him was true, brave, heroic, pure! His one foible—pride of race—was more likely to sustain his virtues than to lead him into vice.

Therefore her faith in him had been unbounded. And so, when sorrow came to them both, and in such a shape as must have shaken the confidence of almost

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any other woman, she only thought that the trouble was all the outcome of a temporarily disordered mind, the result of brain fever, brought on by heroic toil and privation, and she loved him all the more for his struggles and his sufferings. And ill as he was at the time of their intended marriage, she was resolved that the ceremony should go forward, so as to give her the wife's right of taking personal care of the invalid, and nursing him back to health of mind and body. And all the earnest remonstrances of her friends and relatives failed to shake her resolution.

Then, later, after the marriage ceremony had been performed, and the voyage to the Isle of Storms had been made, and she discovered that William Harcourt had suddenly and mysteriously disappeared, without a word of adieu or explanation, and that William Hanson stood confronting her and claiming her as his lawfully wedded wife—in all the shock, the chaos, the catastrophe of the situation, she had never dreamed of attaching blame or responsibility to Harcourt.

She had instantly arraigned her oft-rejected and offensively persistent suitor as the sole agent in her bridegroom's mysterious vanishment.

She had then and there accused Hanson of making away with his friend, of murdering him, and sinking his body in the sea.

And when, in proof of Harcourt's voluntary desertion of her, he had shown her Harcourt's letter of renunciation, she had contemptuously torn it up and cast it from her, denouncing it as a base forgery.

Then, when, in proof of his own lawful claim upon her, he had exhibited the marriage license and the minister's certificate, she had treated those documents with the like disdain and scorn as counterfeits. And she had secluded herself in her rooms, refusing to recognize the existence of the usurper of her little kingdom.

Even later still, when she had effected her escape, unharmed, from her captor, leaving him in a usurped position of her home, and had gone with her friends

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to Washington, the scene of the fraudulent marriage, and had, with the aid of her attorney, sifted the evidence, she could recognize only Hanson's agency in all the proceedings.

She perfectly vindicated Harcourt from any knowledge or any conscious share in that infamous imposture, and declared it as her unalterable conviction that from the beginning of this affair to its end, Harcourt had been feloniously dealt with by Hanson, who had taken the basest advantage of his friend's mental condition to entrap, deceive and destroy him for the purpose of getting final possession of his bride!

How any man, alone, without a confederate, could have contrived and carried out such a scheme of villainy, Roma Fronde could not imagine. But all the same she absolutely assured herself that Hanson had done this. She could not do otherwise, for her only alternative was to convict Harcourt of the basest villainy that ever blackened the soul of man. And this alternative she could not for a moment contemplate.

She had continued to believe Harcourt to be insane, and through his insanity to have been the dupe and victim of the most unscrupulous and most accomplished villain she had ever heard of or read of.

From the time at which he had so almost supernaturally vanished from the Isle of Storms on the fifteenth of November, in the preceding year, to this first day of June, a period of six months and two weeks, she had not seen Harcourt until she went that day to see him in his cell in the county jail of Ceciltown.

She had gone to see him that morning, feeling so perfectly convinced of his insanity that she had considered his self-surrender to the law and self-accusation before the magistrate to be but another manifestation of a now confirmed and hopeless mania.

And she had mentally decided that, although she must never marry a maniac, for any reason whatever,

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she would do all for him that the most loving and devoted sister might do.

She would, with Mr. Merritt's advice and assistance, engage the best counsel in the State to defend Harcourt against the charge he had insanely brought upon himself.

And when he should be acquitted—as, of course, as soon as the truth should be made manifest, he must be acquitted—she would engage the highest medical experts in the country—yes, in the world, if necessary!—to treat his case.

With these thoughts, feelings, intentions, she had gone to the prison and seen him for the first time since she had parted from him at the front door of Guyon Hall, on the evening of her wedding day—parted from him, as she had then believed, only for a few minutes, while he walked down to the boat to see his friend and groomsman off. How little she dreamed then, while waiting for his quick return, that their very next meeting would be in the county jail of Ceciltown, where he would be confined under the charge of willful murder.

She had gone to the prison, expecting to find him a confirmed lunatic—as, indeed, his first wild words and actions on suddenly meeting her seemed to prove him to be.

But as she talked with him, and his agitation subsided, this preconceived opinion had been gradually so modified that, by the time she had taken her leave of him, it was altogether reversed, and she knew that Will Harcourt was not then, and never had been, insane, although he seemed to have passed through a moral tempest of such tragic and tremendous character as might have wrecked the mind of any man, and had really brought him to the deepest depths of despair.

What was the nature of this mental and moral cyclone?

She could not even surmise; but his statement would inform her.

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With this question in her mind, she had opened his manuscript and began to read.

Harcourt, in his statement, told the whole, hard, bare, plain facts, without, as we said before, the slightest attempt to excuse himself or palliate his sin—told it with more detail than he had given when making his deposition before the magistrate.

By this, Roma Fronde learned much more than she had known or suspected of her lover's life at the Isle of Storms.

And notwithstanding the uncompromising dealing with only hard facts in the style of his statement, Roma Fronde was able to "read between the lines," and understood how great had been the temptations and perils, how many the pitfalls in the youth's life at the Crest House, and how much more sinned against than sinning he had been.

She learned that when he was engaged by Thomas Todd, the proprietor of the Crest House, on the Isle of Storms, to go there and take the situation of a hotel clerk, he found that, in addition to his clerkly duties, he was also expected to make himself agreeable to the guests by taking a hand at cards, a partner in the dance, or any share in any of their amusements whenever he should be disengaged and required to do so.

She also learned that at the Crest House he had met many of his father's old, intimate friends, who showed him much sympathy, friendship and attention for his father's sake.

They took every opportunity to invite him to their card parties in the gentlemen's room, where small stakes were played for, and much wine and liquor drank. And Harcourt was always pressed to partake.

"It will do you good, my dear boy. Put some color into your pale cheeks," they were accustomed to say, in these or other words to the same effect.

And the poor youth saw no harm nor hidden peril either in the card playing or in the wine drinking.

Had not his own honored father and honorable elder brothers frequently entertained their friends

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and neighbors with card parties in which money in large or small sums was always staked and won and lost? And was there not always plenty of wine and liquors drank on these occasions?

From gambling and drinking with these

"Potent, grave and reverend seigniors,"

old and esteemed friends of his heroic father, it was an "easy descent" to fall into the habit of sitting up late at night to play cards and drink beer with miscellaneous men in the office, after all the other guests of the house had gone to rest.

There was one particular guest at the Crest House, probably the least honest, yet the most honored of all there.

He had the finest suit of rooms in the hotel. He kept a fine saddle horse, and a finer pair of carriage horses in the stables, and a sulky, victoria and "clarence" in the carriage houses. He kept three servants, a groom, a coachman and a valet.

He was known to be a bachelor, and believed to be rich. His carriages and horses were always at the orders of his lady friends, either for rides and drives around the island beach, or for more extended excursions over the hills and through the forests of the mainland, to and from which the carriages, horses and people would be conveyed by the ferryboat plying between Snowden and the isle.

Besides all that, he waltzed "like an angel," as all the girls declared. He gave frequent late suppers, to the great advantage of the house, as he ordered hampers of champagne and boxes of heavier wines and liquors, on all of which Mr. Thomas Todd made a neat little profit of from one hundred to five hundred per cent. This course made this particular guest exceedingly valuable and popular both to landlord and lodgers.

Tom Todd gave his servants special charge concerning him.

"Show Mr. Yelverton every attention," was the

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order he gave to his staff, adding: "The first man or woman Mr. Yelverton complains of goes on the instant—goes without a hearing! It will be enough if Mr. Yelverton should complain of him or of her!"

And his dependents all understood that if there should be twenty bells all ringing at the same time in that house, and Mr. Yelverton's bell happened to be one of them, Mr. Yelverton's call must be answered at once, and his orders obeyed promptly and completely, even if his exacting services should require the total neglect of the other nineteen.

Of course Tom Todd never ventured to couch his instructions in such very objectionable terms in speaking of Yelverton to young Harcourt; but all the same, the landlord made the young clerk understand that he was to make himself very agreeable and obliging to this profitable guest.

All this Roma Fronde learned, or surmised, in reading, or reading between the lines of, Harcourt's statement. And she felt that this was but the preparation for some terrible crisis.

Then it came.

She learned the story of that fatal fifteenth of September, as she learned the preceding, partly from the narrative, partly from her own sure inferences drawn from her knowledge of Harcourt's character and antecedents—the story of that night, which must evermore remain a dark spot in her consciousness, as it was a blot in the life of her lover.

She learned how, on that night, when the business of the day seemed over, when the last trip of the ferryboat had been made, and the last guest for the day had arrived and been recorded, when the card tables in the gentlemen's room had all been filled up, Nathan Yelverton, the gambler, who, rather than not play at the cards which were his life, would condescend to sit down with such an unskillful antagonist, and such a poor man, as the young hotel clerk—strolled into the office, where there were two or three card parties already at the little tables, and challenged Harcourt to play.

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The game selected—perhaps in consideration of the young man's want of skill—was one of pure chance—that is, pure chance, if the gambler does not manipulate the cards to his own advantage.

And it is probable that, in the beginning of this game, this sharper had no such intention; for of what profit could it be to cheat this poor young fellow, who, at most, could only afford to play at dime points, and whose cash must soon be exhausted, and whose I O U would not be worth the proverbial estimate—"the paper on which it was written"?

So it is not at all likely that Yelverton sat down to play against Harcourt with any nefarious design.

He only wanted to amuse himself with a game of pure chance, and, in fact, he was very much amused at the way in which the luck seemed to run all in favor of this inexperienced youth, and at the high exhilaration of the latter in his rare good fortune.

But it seemed that the devil was an uncounted factor in this game, and meant to win the stakes of both the players; for what happened next?

While young Harcourt was still laughing over his unexpected winnings, and Yelverton was enjoying the freak of fortune that favored such an "innocent" as Will Harcourt in this game of chance, who, if it had been a game of skill, must have been beaten at every point, a bustle was heard in the hall—a bustle of steps and voices—and presently the door was opened, and a stranger entered the office, followed by a porter, carrying his bag.

This was a complete surprise to everyone concerned, as the last trip of the ferryboat had been made two hours before, and there was no other way by which visitors were expected to arrive on the island.

But the stranger soon explained the case.

To the young hotel clerk, who, on the entrance of the new guest, had promptly laid down his cards, and had gone to his desk behind the counter, the stranger had given his name and address as Charles Cutts, broker, Federal Street, Baltimore, and had

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added that he had landed off the yacht of a friend, bound from Baltimore to New York.

When a room had been assigned to him, and the porter had taken up his bag, to show him the way, Cutts suddenly paused, as if he had remembered something, took a thick portemonnaie from his pocket, and explained that he wished to place it in charge of the clerk, to be locked in the safe for the night.

Then he opened the portemonnaie, counted out several thousand dollars in one hundred and five-hundred-dollar greenbacks on the counter, in the sight of Harcourt, then, when the amount was noted, put them back again in the portemonnaie, and closed and gave the latter into the keeping of the clerk, taking a receipt for it.

This done, the stranger nodded good-night and left the office, attended by the porter, carrying his bag.

Nathan Yelverton, the gambler, had noted the whole of that money transaction.

As young Harcourt moved toward the safe, which was a fixture in the solid masonry in the walls of the office, Yelverton called to him impatiently to come and continue his game.

And Harcourt thrust the heavy portemonnaie in his pocket, thinking that when the game was over he could lock it in the strong box.

And from the moment that the doomed youth re-seated himself at the table, with that money in his pocket, and the sharper seated opposite, that game was no longer a game of chance, but a game of infernal skill, cunning and assurance, from which the unhappy dupe would have no more "chance" of escaping with either funds or honor than the poor fly caught in the spider's web would have of getting off with life and limb.

He flattered young Harcourt as a favorite of fortune, congratulated him on his wonderful run of luck, and declared that he must have a bottle of champagne in which to celebrate it.

But this sad and too true story of the young clerk's temptation and fall has been told before, in the first

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part of this story. I do not wish to weary you, my reader, with vain repetitions; but only to touch this theme by way of putting you "en rapport" with Roma Fronde, who was learning the facts for the first time from William Harcourt's confession.

She understood it all! How the youth had fallen into the power of the demon; how he had been stimulated and excited; how he had been plied with wine and bewildered with flattery, until, when scarcely knowing what he did, certainly not appreciating the character of his action, he had staked and lost the money intrusted to his charge by the Baltimore broker!

Not until this fatal deed was done—irrevocably done!—did he come to his senses!—to the knowledge of his ruin and disgrace! Ah! what an awakening! What a revelation! Honor gone forever! lost irretrievably!—reputation, liberty, love—all that makes life worth the living lost, vanished—unless he could recover that money!

Our readers who have accompanied us this far in William Harcourt's tragic story, may remember his frantic appeals to the mercy of the sharper who had swindled him, for a restoration of that money, and the sarcastic ridicule with which his agonized prayers were answered.

They may recall the extremity of anguish and humiliation that drove him at length to the desperate venture of going to the gambler's room in the dead of night, entering it by means of his pass key and trying to recover that broker's money intrusted to his charge, and of which he had been cheated.

How, when he had secured it and was about to leave the room, he was startled by a click, turned to see a pistol in the hands of the gambler aimed at his head, and had only time to spring upon his intended murderer and strike up the weapon, which instantly went off, and the holder of it fell dead.

How the panic-stricken young man, finding himself caught in the grinding machinery of such a horrible fatality, instinctively took steps for self-preservation,

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fastened the door from within, escaped through the window, closing it after him with a spring which could only be opened from within, and by these, simple and altogether impulsive precautions, he not only escaped suspicion, but, without intending to do so, made the death of the gambler to seem a suicide.

How, though believing himself to be safe from the law, after a coroner's jury had rendered their verdict, he was still so tortured by remorse, that but for his horror of inflicting such a shock as the knowledge of his position would be to his aged mother and his young betrothed, he must have gone, then and there, and given himself up to justice.

How the thought of those beloved ones withheld him.

How he knew and felt that his sin had put an insurmountable, everlasting barrier between himself and his betrothed, since, though apparently secure from the law, he should not venture to make her share his sin-laden life.

How it was that while he was in this despairing state of mind, late at night after the day when the coroner's jury had given their verdict of suicide, and Yelverton's body had been shipped to Washington, to be entombed in the Congressional Cemetery, and all seemed over, Hanson had come to him as he sat alone in the office, laid his hand on his shoulder, and startled him with the terrible words:

"Thou art the man!" and revealed to him his own full knowledge of all the circumstances that led to the death of Nathan Yelverton, the gambler.

How when Hanson, the secret witness, the blackmailer, had sufficiently shocked and horrified the young man with graphic pictures of all the shame, anguish and despair which the exposure of his crime, with the trial and the certain conviction, would bring upon his aged and widowed mother and his fair, high-born betrothed, he made it the sole condition of his secrecy that Harcourt should renounce his affianced bride, and even help Hanson to win her for himself.

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Roma Fronde read all this with sickening horror and a deadly sinking of her strong heart.

She read how, at the appointed interview on the northern end of the isle—the "Snake's Rattles"—an appropriate scene for the plot—Hanson revealed his plan in all its details, and supported it by the most artful falsehoods.

"You know," he said, "that you have lost Roma Fronde forever. You can never fulfill your engagement to marry her, nor can you ever explain to her why you fail to do so. Give her to me, and help me to get her. I was really her first lover, and though you may not know it, her first beloved. My sister was her bosom friend. Roma and myself were sweethearts from the time of her childhood and my earlier youth. We should have been happily married before this if you had not come between us. Give her up to me, or, rather, give her back to me. You cannot have her; do not be the dog in the manger to keep me from her, to keep her, perhaps, from ever marrying and becoming a happy wife and mother. Do not blight her life because you cannot have her yourself."

"But," poor Harcourt had ventured to argue, "though I may not—though assuredly I must not—marry Miss Fronde, I have neither the right nor the power to influence her choice of a happier man."

Now came Hanson's last diabolical proposal.

"No," he said, "you cannot influence her choice, but you give her to me in marriage, all the same, and I will reconcile her to the union afterward. I was her first lover and beloved, and old coals are soon kindled, you know."

And then he revealed his plan.

That Harcourt should seem to hurry on his own marriage with Roma Fronde, that he should urge her to an early ceremony, that Hanson should be appointed groomsman, and be intrusted with all the arrangements, that he should get the marriage license—but in his own name—that he should engage the minister—but for himself—that on the night before the marriage he should put the notice of it in the

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printers' hands, so that it should appear in the newspapers on the day of the wedding, that by arrangement with the officiating minister, upon some pretext of sudden inflammation of the eyes in the case of the bride, the gas should be lowered, and the church in a very subdued light at the beginning of the ceremony, and by secret understanding with the sexton, the gas should be turned almost entirely off at the critical moment of the proceedings, when the bridegroom takes the hand of the bride, 'puts the ring on her finger and makes his vows. At that moment Hanson, the groomsman, favored by the darkness, should slip his hand past Harcourt, take the lady's hand, put the ring on her finger and make his marriage vows to her, so that when it should be the bride's turn to respond she would do so by vowing to take him, "William," for her "wedded husband, to have and to hold," etc., etc., really thinking of and meaning William Harcourt, and all unconscious of holding the hand of William Hanson.

And so Roma Fronde should "lawfully" marry William Hanson while she was under the impression that she was marrying William Harcourt, her beloved, her betrothed.

And the delusion should be kept up—to avoid a scene—until the bridal party should be far from the place of the wedding ceremony.

Hanson was to attend the supposed bridal pair to the place of their destination for the night, and then, without entering the house, Harcourt should vanish and leave Hanson to announce himself to the lady as her real bridegroom, the man she had lawfully married instead of Harcourt, who had renounced her in his favor, and for good reason.

The plan bristled with difficulties, danger and uncertainty. But Hanson was prepared to dare, to meet and to bear everything in his pursuit of the woman with whom he was madly, passionately in love.

"This is the most treacherous, atrocious, infernal plot that was ever conceived!" exclaimed Harcourt,

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as soon as the whole scheme had been laid open to him.

"Quite so," frankly responded Hanson. "But, you see, I love the girl, and I am willing to do and dare and bear, and even lie, and cheat, and murder for her, if necessary to the possession of her. You cannot possibly characterize my policy by worse names than I have called it myself."

"Man! Beast! Devil! You are without shame and without remorse!" bitterly burst from the lips of Harcourt, in his desperation.

"Utterly," coolly assented Hanson. "But I am, also, as a matter of course, without hypocrisy; that is something to be said in my favor. I do not come here and pose as the unhappy son of a heroic father, who fell in battle while gallantly fighting for the freedom of his country, etc., etc., and, meanwhile—— But, there! I will be more generous than you are and spare your feelings."

"And what if I do not agree to your diabolical conditions?" demanded Harcourt.

"The alternative is beautiful in its simplicity. I denounce you as the murderer of Nathan Yelverton and become the chief witness, the eye witness, against you. You will be tried, convicted, sent to the gallows, or the State prison for life. Your widowed mother, without another child to comfort her, will go mad, or die, or both. Your fair betrothed will never hold up her lovely head again, for, as you know, the newspapers will get hold of every fact in relation to yourself and all connected with you, and that they will harp upon every item of news, and how the reading public will gloat over it. The more private, delicate, sacred the matter may be, the more widely they will spread it abroad. This will not affect the mother. She will be dead or mad. But think how it will affect Miss Fronde—the humiliation it will bring upon her."

Poor William Harcourt! He was in the power of the fiend. He seemed in the grip of a relentless destiny. He yielded, as we know he did, but was pursued and tortured by remorse, until, at the death

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of his mother, he gave himself up to justice, that the burden should be lifted from his soul; that he should be judged by men better, wiser, more self-controlled than himself.

In concluding his confession to Roma he said:

"I have told you all. I have done all that I can to atone for my sin against the law by surrendering myself to justice. But, oh! how can I ever atone for my sin against you! If I were to give my body to be burned, that could not expiate the wrong I did you in my madness and desperation. I dare not ask you to forgive me. You could not, if you would. But I hope that after I shall have been consigned to the doom I court, to the scaffold or the State prison, you may forget me in my felon grave or convict's cell. And—when I have expiated my sin and dare to pray —I will pray God to bless you forever."

CHAPTER XIII

WHAT FOLLOWED

Roma Fronde knew the worst at last.

Ah! let us not seek to probe the wound that went too near the vital center of her being to be touched.

She mechanically folded the manuscript, and still holding it in her fingers, dropped her hands upon her lap, and sank back on her seat.

Life seemed to have come to an end with her.

All her hopes of happiness for this world seemed gone. But she was not thinking of them. All her plans of usefulness seemed to have fallen into chaos around her. But she was not regretting even them. She could not reflect. She could scarcely feel. A lethargy like the lethargy of approaching death was upon her, holding all her faculties of mind and body in abeyance.

Her trance was broken into by the entrance of the

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boy Titus, who came, hat in hand, with his customary polite bow and smile, saying

"Here I am, mum. Just in time, as you see!"

And he triumphantly pointed to the clock, which stood upon the mantelpiece, for it was on the stroke of nine, and began to strike even as he spoke.

Miss Fronde came partly out of her trance, but spoke only mechanically:

"Yes, I see, you are very punctual. Go to bed, now, my boy. Good-night."

Something in the faint, flat tones of her voice, something in the set look of her white face, and in the listless, motionless position of her form troubled Titus. He looked at her wistfully. He felt an increasing anxiety. He was too respectful to give this feeling any distinct expression, yet he could not go and leave her without making some effort in her service. So he compromised by asking the harmless question:

"Can I do anything for you, mum, before I go?"

"No, my boy, nothing," replied Miss Fronde, coming a little further out of her abstraction.

"Maybe I had better bring my book and sit down here with you, in case you should want me to do anything. I could just study my lesson for to-morrow, and not 'sturb you, mum," suggested Titus, sorely unwilling to leave the lady.

"No, my boy. It is your bedtime. And you are not yet in strong health. Good-night," said Miss Fronde, in a tone that had no indecision in it.

"Good-night, mum," said the boy, with his polite bow; and he reluctantly left the room.

The spell of mute, motionless horror and despair that had bound Roma Fronde was broken. She slipped the manuscript into her pocket and arose.

"He was sorely tempted. Oh, how sorely tempted! And he fell—my poor Will fell. Ah! since he has fallen, who can stand?" she moaned, walking up and down the floor, and wringing her hands in an anguish so acute that it must have killed or maddened a weaker woman.

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But neither death nor madness, neither tears nor swoon, came to this strong Amazon's relief.

And—as was perfectly consistent with Roma Fronde's pure spirit—the awful fate that was overhanging her lover had no share in causing the unutterable anguish with which she had mourned his fall. It was not that he should suffer ignominious punishment in State prison, or a shameful death on the gallows. No. But that he should have so sinned—so fallen.

Not for one moment, however, did the woman dream of deserting her betrothed. Had she been capable of so doing, she must have been incapable of suffering as she did in the knowledge of his sin.

She threw herself down in her chair again, as near exhaustion as her strong mind and body ever came.

"But he has done all that he could do to atone for his sin," she said, pleading his cause with herself; "all that man could do; more than any but a just man would do. When he might have lived on with impunity — free, undisturbed, unsuspected, loved, honored, courted—when he might have married me, and gone on in his path of ambition for civic and national honors—he sacrificed all; and as soon as the poor, old mother, whom he spared, was laid in her grave, he gave himself up to justice, to suffer all that the law could inflict for his deed—death on the scaffold, or penal slavery for life."

Yes, one of these dooms was surely before him. There could be no escape. Not the slightest ground on which to found the faintest hope for his escape.

And yet, with all this before him and before her, who must suffer, too, she was the better satisfied with him that he should have given himself up for judgment.

She did not say to herself that she would never forsake him, for the question of doing so never once occurred to her mind.

She would share his misery, as she would have shared his happiness.

The reading of his statement had given wounds

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that seemed incurable; but in no way had it altered her plans for him. She would still seek for him the best counsel to be found in the State—counsel much more needed now that there were known to be real and not imaginary grounds for his self-accusation.

She could not conceal from herself the utter hopelessness of his case. All that the ablest counsel in the State could do; all that the most favorably disposed judge could do; all that the most liberal jury could do, would be to make his crime manslaughter in the first degree, instead of willful murder, and consign him to penal servitude for life instead of to the gallows.

But this mitigation of an extreme verdict and an extreme penalty must be secured, if possible.

Roma Fronde considered that she stood quite alone in the world; that there was no one to be humiliated by her devotion to this unhappy lover, who was to have been her husband.

"Whatever sacrifice I may feel called upon to make for him—and I would make any consistent with my duty to the Lord—can hurt no one," she said, with some satisfaction.

She rose again, and began to walk restlessly up and down the floor of her sitting room, and then it occurred to her that it would be prudent to go to bed and rest in body, even if she should not be able to sleep and rest in mind, so, at least, she could preserve strength for the coming interview with her imprisoned lover.

Everyone in the house was asleep except herself.

She lighted her wax taper, turned down the light of her lamp and went up to her chamber.

There she found her night light burning, and little Owlet fast asleep in the white, canopied bed.

She knelt beside the bed and offered up her usual evening prayers and thanksgivings, and then she prayed especially and earnestly for Will Harcourt, and for light and guidance for herself in her relations toward him.

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Finally she went to bed, but not to forget her heavy cares in sleep.

Sleep was an impossible relief to the anguish of her spirit.

She lay awake reflecting on that fatal confession—every word of which seemed burned in upon her memory—and still praying for light and strength to see and to do her whole duty, though never for an instant did it occur to her that it was any more than her simple duty to be faithful, through good report and evil report, to the man whom she had promised to wed, "for better or worse."

So passed the weary night.

At sunrise Roma rose and dressed. She had just completed her toilet when little Owlet's voice from the bed startled her with the question:

"What is the matter with you, Lady? Are you ill? I never saw you look so white in all my life, or with any black circles around your eyes, either! Are you ill, Lady?"

"No, dear; but I have had a sleepless night," Miss Fronde answered.

"Well, then, why didn't you stay in bed and try to sleep?"

"Because I could not have slept if I had tried, dear."

Owlet immediately jumped out of bed and ran to her friend.

"Something is troubling you. What is it?" she asked.

"Mr. Harcourt is in prison, you know. Is not that enough to trouble me?"

"Mr. William, you mean?"

"Yes, dear, our friend. Is not that cause for trouble?"

"Oh, yes, indeed it is. ' Will you go to see him again to-day, Lady?"

"Yes, love."

"And let me go again?"

"Yes, Owlet; we will go immediately after break-

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fast, and spend the whole day with him. Wouldn't you like that?"

"Oh, yes, indeed!"

"And then when we come back we shall stop at the Snowden railway station and wait for Mr. Merritt, and take him home with us in the boat."

"Is he coming?" gleefully demanded Owlet; for she loved her few friends, and Amos Merritt was among them.

"Yes, dear; he will come down by train from Washington, and arrive about seven o'clock; so we must be at the station to meet him. He is coming to help Mr. Harcourt as much as he can."

"I am glad he is coming. He will be of so much use. He is possessed of common sense, you know, Lady."

Owlet dressed herself as fast as she could, and the two went down to the breakfast room, where they found Wilet and Titus engaged in setting the table.

Wilet dropped her courtesy, and Titus made his bow.

Miss Fronde and Owlet wished them both good-morning, and then the lady inquired:

"Where is Jerusalem?"

"Oh, Lor', youn' mist'ess! Doane ax me w'ere dot po', ole, forsook sinner is! He's in pu'gatory! Dere's w'ere he is!" Wilet replied, taking a pile of plates from Titus, who had just brought them from the corner cupboard, and arranged them on the table.

"Is he ill?" inquired Miss Fronde.

"Nuffin' mo' dan 'fects ob his junk yis'd'y! Needn' chouble 'bout he, ma'am! He 'serves all he's got! An' he'll be all yight to-morrer, dough I shall hab to do his work to-day," concluded Wilet, as she put the finishing touches on the arrangement of the table, and went out to see after the breakfast.

Titus was about to follow her, when Miss Fronde called him back.

"Do you think you can get the boat out for me, my boy?" she inquired.

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"Oh, yes, mum! Like a daisy!" he confidently replied.

"Very well, then! Go and do it! And call at Lucy's cabin, and get Tom to help you with it."

"Yes, mum. Thanky, mum. He might help, though I do understand all about rowboats! If I didn't I would not say so, mum."

"I am very sure you would not. Now, hurry off! Get the boat out as soon as possible. Then leave Tom in charge of it, and hasten back here to your breakfast."

The boy bowed and ran away.

He made such good speed that he re-entered the room just as Wilet was placing the breakfast on the table.

The party of three spent very little time over the morning meal.

When it was over, Titus ran away, down to the boat, to do anything more that might be needed to be done there.

Miss Fronde and Owlet went upstairs to put on their hats and wraps, and soon came down again and started for the boat.

When they reached the sands they found both Titus and Tom rocking in the boat.

"Mornin', mist'ess, ma'am," said the black boy, rising, taking off his ragged hat and bowing. "Titus tell me how po' ole Uncle 'Yusalem hab got de jimjams, an' can't yow, an' how you', mist'ess, ma'am, an' Titus hisse'f will hab to yow de boat yo'se'ves. Is dat so, mist'ess, ma'am?"

"It is quite true, Tom," replied the lady.

"Den I would mos' 'spectfully 'luminate, mist'ess, ma'am, as I am myse'f a marster han' wid de o' an' de yowboat, an' sich hab been ebber sence I were seben yea' ole, w'en me an' mammy first' libbed on dis ole sarpint. W'ich, ef yo' would trus' me, mist'ess, ma'am, to yow yo' 'cross de bay, yo' would fine out fo' yo'se'f," concluded Tom, standing hat in hand.

"Very well, Tom. I am glad to hear it. There can be no harm in letting you try. If you should not

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succeed, I can relieve you of the oars. But where did you learn to row?" Miss Fronde inquired.

"Lor', mist'ess, ma'am, yight yere, on de ole sarpint itself. Mammy say, she say, fo' I were knee high to a g'asshopper. So mammy say."

"I am almost inclined to believe that rowing comes by nature to children born on the island here," said Miss Fronde.

"Tom can row better than me, mum. Him and me used to row across the Potomac and the Anacostia rivers often, when we had a holiday and a little pocket money to hire a boat. And, really, he does row better than me, mum," said Titus, generously.

Miss Fronde looked approvingly at the boy, and then, turning to Tom, said:

"Very well; that settles it. Since Titus so warmly indorses your skill, you shall have your trial. Sit down again and take a pair of oars."

Then Miss Fronde led Owlet into the boat, dropped into a seat, placed the child beside her, and took the tiller, while the two boys pushed off the boat.

They were soon rowed swiftly over the bay, with the tide in their favor.

In just thirty minutes after leaving the Isle of Storms they landed at the wharf of Snowden.

Miss Fronde stepped out of the boat, leading little Owlet, and then stopped on the shore to give the boys her instructions for the day.

She gave them money to buy a decent new hat for Tom, and luncheon for both. Lastly, she told them that one of the two must always stay with the boat, while the other should go to the village, and that they might take turns in doing so.

Then she turned with the child and walked rapidly up the sandy road leading from the shore to the village and through the village to the railway depot, which they reached just in time to catch the train for Ceciltown.

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CHAPTER XIV

AFTER THE REVELATION

THE Ceciltown tradespeople were very prompt in filling the orders of Miss Fronde and delivering the goods at the jail.

As soon as Warden Miltimore heard of their arrival, he went to Harcourt's cell and asked him to come into the sheriff's room for an hour, where he left him with the morning papers for occupation, and under the charge of a keeper.

Then Warden Miltimore went back to Harcourt's cell and personally attended to the arrangement of the comfortable furniture sent in by Miss Fronde.

It really took but a little time to move out the old fittings and put in the new; to put the iron bedstead, with its spring mattress, down pillows and snow-white bedding in place of the old cot, with its coarse coverings; a washstand, with a closet, drawers and looking-glass in place of the wooden bench; a strip of sage green carpet on the floor, and white muslin curtains to the two grated windows—for it will be remembered that this was a double corner cell, with a window looking north and a window looking west—an easy rocking-chair, and a small, round stand in the middle of the cell, and, lastly, a small trunk, filled with comforts, which was shoved under the bed.

These articles nearly filled up all the space, but certainly added to the comforts and improved the appearance of the place.

When all was done, the warden went and brought Harcourt back to the cell, and said:

"Now, this is not so bad as it was. It is still narrow, but so are the staterooms on the best steamers. And this is as prettily fitted up as they."

"Who has done this?" inquired the young man, as a matter of form, more than curiosity, for he was at no loss to know.

"The young lady you are engaged to marry, Miss

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Fronde, sent them in, and I, with the help of young Estep, put them in place," replied Mr. Miltimore.

Harcourt gazed at him in astonishment, not at hearing Miss Fronde had sent in the furniture, but that the warden should know he was or ever had been engaged to marry her.

The warden misunderstood his looks, and hastened to add:

"The county, you know, does not provide anything more than the barest necessities of life for—for—for the inmates of this house."

He could not bear to use the word "prisoners" to the son of his old friend.

"Miss Fronde is very kind. Much too kind to a poor wretch like me," Harcourt murmured, in a low tone. And he said no more. He did not even ask the warden how he came to know of the engagement between Miss Fronde and himself, for a moment's reflection had convinced him that Roma, in the loyalty of her love, in the magnanimity of her character, had herself given the information.

The warden went away.

Harcourt threw himself down on his bed, no longer hard and unyielding, but soft and elastic. Yet he scarcely noticed the difference. The improvement in his surroundings was lost upon him.

After once responding to the warden's demand on his attention to look at them, he seemed to forget them.

His mind was preoccupied with thoughts of Roma, and whether she was not even then reading his humiliating confession. Whether, after reading it, she could ever speak to him, or look upon him again.

His supper was brought to him from the warden's table, arranged on the little, round stand, and left there. He could not touch it. An hour later it was taken away untasted. Anxiety and suspense had deprived him of all appetite.

Night came, but brought no sleep, no rest to him, more than it did to her of whom he was thinking.

"She is reading my shameful confession even now,"

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he had said, in the earlier hours of the evening. "She is reading it even now for she said she would read it before she slept. She is reading it in all its humiliating details. Oh, heaven of heavens! What will she —what can she—think of me? She promised to go through that narrative before she should sleep this night, and she, moreover, promised to bring it back in person to-morrow morning. But will she—can she do it after reading the disgraceful story?—yes, she will! Roma Fronde will keep her word at any cost! She will come! But how will she come? What will she say? How can I ever bear to look her in the face?" he groaned, rolling and writhing on his bed.

He felt that he would rather die—rather be burned at the stake, than meet her eyes again, after she should have read that degrading confession.

But—just to meet those pure, true, strong eyes, under just such humiliating circumstances, was a part of his punishment—a part of his atonement, not to be avoided, but to be endured.

"She has finished the manuscript by this time," he said, when the long, sleepless night drew toward morning. "And what does she think of me, now? How does she feel toward me, lost and ruined sinner that I am? Does she utterly loathe and abhor me? Or is her scorn of me too deep to reach hatred? Does she despise herself for ever having loved me? Does she repent ever having promised, in her blind faith, to bring the manuscript back in person? But even if she does so repent, she will keep her word and bring it. But how will she look at me when she does bring it? What will she say to me? How can I bear her looks? What can I reply to her reproaches? Oh —oh, Heaven!" he moaned, rolling over, face downward, on his pillow.

Night waned. Day dawned. The prison was astir. The cell doors were all unlocked, and the prisoners called to go down to the washroom.

Harcourt joined the throng. And the program of the preceding day was performed again on this.

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When the general ablutions were completed, the prisoners were marched back to their corridor.

Harcourt, on re-entering his cell, began to put the place in order.

He was not awkward at this. His impoverished college life, when he had lived in one poor room, and had done all his own work, and his still ruder laborer's life in New York, when he had again lived in one poor room, and had done all his own housework in addition to his daily labor on the railroad track, had prepared him for it.

While he was so engaged, the wheelbarrow containing the county's provender for the prisoners passed down the corridor, stopping at every cell door, to dispose the coffee, corn bread and salt herring that made the morning's meal.

But by the time he had finished his task, Keeper Estep appeared with his breakfast sent from the warden's table, neatly arranged on a tray, which he placed upon the small stand and left there.

Harcourt drank all the coffee, for, like all mental sufferers, he was consumed with thirst, but he found it impossible to swallow a morsel of solid food.

After a while, Keeper Estep came and took away the tray, and gave the call for the prisoners to come out and take their usual airing in the prison yard.

They all came out of their cells, and formed in a line of march out of the corridor, except Harcourt, who declined to avail himself of the privilege, and remained in the deserted corridor, walking uneasily up and down its length.

But in his present depressed state of mind and body, even this gentle exercise soon wearied him, and he went back to his cell and threw himself down on his bed, and with his hands clasped above his head, tried to brace his mind for what he thought must be a terrible interview with the woman whom he felt that he had wronged and outraged beyond atonement —beyond forgiveness. And who might be expected to enter and confront him at any moment. Even while these thoughts and feelings were torturing and

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maddening brain and heart, steps were heard coming softly along the corridor. The keeper opened the door and said:

"Here's the lady come again to see you."

And Roma, with little Owlet, entered the cell.

Harcourt started up in dismay, every vein and artery throbbing as if his life was thundering out of him at every pore.

Yes. Even though he had been expecting to see her every moment, yet now that she stood before him, her presence seemed a shock of death.

He scarcely dared to raise his eyes to her face. He could not have spoken if his soul had depended on his doing so.

But she spoke very gently.

"Will—dear Will," she said. And there was no reproach in her face. There was nothing but love in her tone.

Then he looked up.

There he saw a change that made him forget himself and his humiliation, and cry out in terror and anguish for her! For he beheld her face as white as death, and her eyes dimmed and sunken, and surrounded by dark, livid circles. There was no anger. There was only divine pity in her face.

"My Lord! My Lord! I have killed her! I have killed her! Beast and devil that I am, I have killed her!" he cried, and he dropped his head and covered his face with both hands.

A moment passed, and he felt her soft hands on his head, and her gentle voice in his ear.

"Dear Will, never fear! Never mind! I have only had two sleepless nights, and feel weary. That is all. I am not going to die."

"Oh! why do you not hate me—spurn me—curse me, Roma?" he wildly demanded.

She stooped and whispered:

"Because I love you, Will."

"Love me! A lost wretch like me!" he moaned, in a low, expiring voice.

Still she murmured in low music at his ear:

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"If your heart-rending repentance, your heroic expiation had not challenged my love and admiration, still I should love you, Will, because I cannot but love you."

"Oh, why! oh, why is this mercy, this blessing still vouchsafed to me, unworthy as I am? Why should you care for me, Miss Fronde?"

"I told you, dear, because I cannot help it."

"But why can you not, my queen?"

"Because once having given my love, I have given it forever, and can never recall it again. And just because I love you in this way, Will, I know that you are altogether worthy of such love. I have enough of self-knowledge and self-respect to feel sure that I never could have so loved an unworthy spirit!"

"Oh, Roma! Roma! it is with the light and glory of the purity and nobility of your own spirit that you surround me, and through which you see me, Roma! You do not see the moral monster that I am!"

"Hush, Will! Hush, my dear! You are morbid in your anguish and despair. You have been tempted almost beyond the power of man to resist. You have sinned, but you have most grievously repented and honorably atoned by giving yourself up to justice, when you need not have done so. You have done all that man could do to expiate your sin. No one could do more. Few—none, perhaps—would do so much! I am glad, glad you gave yourself up to justice, Will! Yes! even though you should suffer the extreme penalty of the law! For your having done so must prove to everyone, as it proves to me, who do not want the proof, that your fault was an outward and circumstantial action, not an inward and cherished passion—the sin of surprise and accident—not the sin of your choice, the sin of your soul!"

"You comfort me! Oh, you comfort me, Roma!" he murmured, taking her hand and pressing it to his lips.

"And yet, Will," she continued, gravely and sweetly—"and yet it was a sin! A sin, for which your own conscience demands the bitter repentance that

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you have felt, and must feel! The great expiation that you have made, and must make."

"Yes! Yes! Nothing less will satisfy me!"

"And whatever form the ultimate expiation may take, you will be brave to bear it, Will? And I will be firm for your sake. And we will not weaken each other by vain regrets and lamentations, Will, but sustain each other by our mutual courage, fortitude, patience."

"Oh, Roma! Oh, my queen! how have I deserved—— No, I do not deserve this angelic charity!" he burst forth, in a paroxysm of strong emotion.

"Dear Will, there is nothing angelic about it. Only a very real human love. But come, now, dear. Let us talk of your defense. Though you have given yourself up, 'to be dealt with according to law,' and though you may be indicted for willful murder, you will not plead guilty to that charge."

"No, indeed, I will not! For Heaven knows that thre was nothing further from my thoughts, from my nature, or from the facts of the case. I seem to have been caught in the flywheel of some diabolical machinery of delusion, infatuation, temptation, and whirled around and ground up into the ruin that I am! It seems sometimes to me like an irresistible destiny. However, I must not seek to excuse myself in that way. But low as I have fallen, I am not, I never was, capable of committing such a crime," most earnestly replied Harcourt.

"Will, you must not speak of yourself so unjustly! A man who seeks, as you are seeking, to atone for his involuntary sin with his liberty or his life, cannot have fallen so low as you imply. So do not speak of yourself in that manner. Now, let us return to our subject. Since the indictment against you is almost sure to be willful murder, and since you are not guilty of that crime, we must engage the ablest counsel to be found in the State to defend you from that charge."

"Believe me, Roma, I never once thought of engaging counsel for my defense! I was inclined to

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let the prosecution have its own way with me undisturbed," Harcourt said.

"If the law were always just, you might safely trust it. But you know it is not so," Roma suggested.

"Dear! the best that the ablest and most elequent lawyer in the State or in the world could do for me would be to convince the jury that my offense was manslaughter in the first degree, instead of willful murder. You never dreamed of an acquittal for me!"

"No, Will. But even if they save your life, that will be something gained."

"If they do that, dear, by bringing in a verdict for manslaughter in the first degree, my doom—we must look it bravely in the face—will be imprisonment for life!"

"With the courage to bear bravely all that it will impose—with the hope of release even in this world—for 'while there is life, there is hope,' and a good life led even in prison under a life sentence may bring release at last, even in this world, and will certainly bring happiness in the world to come—I shall not fail you, Will! If they send you to prison, I will go to you as often, and write to you as much, and send you everything that the prison rules will allow. Nothing but insuperable obstacles shall ever hinder me from doing all this so long as you may remain in durance. And if ever you should be released, Will, I will keep my troth with you, and we will give up the world with its vanity, pride, ambition, and we will devote all our talents, time and fortune to the amelioration of suffering humanity. That will be a better life to lead than any we dreamed of in the heyday of our happiness. And even if you should never come out, Will, I will be true to you! You know it, Will! Oh! let that knowledge be some comfort and support to you in your expiation! Will you not, dear?"

"Roma! Roma! your inspiring words would call a soul back from death and hell! Yes, I can dare all, meet all, bear all—all that man and the law may inflict on me, sustained by a love like yours. But, oh,

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my queen! my queen! ought I to allow such a sacrifice as this—the sacrifice of your whole life to a lost creature like myself?" he groaned, in bitterest anguish, covering his face with his hands.

"But this is not so, Will! I do not sacrifice my whole life. The utmost devotion that the authorities will permit me to show you will occupy but a very small portion of my time. My life is to be given up to work among destitute children. Do not be morbid, dear Will! Now, once more to the point. I told you that I had telegraphed our mutual friend, Lawyer Merritt, to come down here and help us."

"Yes."

"When I stopped at Snowden, on my way home yesterday afternoon, I called at the telegraph office from which I had sent my dispatch to Mr. Merritt, and where I had left instructions that any answer which should come, should be kept until called for—and there I found a message from Mr. Merritt awaiting me. It was to the effect that he should leave Washington this morning and arrive at Snowden by seven o'clock this evening. I shall arrange my return this afternoon, so as to be at the Snowden station in time to meet him, and take him home with us in the boat. And to-night I shall have a talk with him. Now, the question is—shall I show him your statement?"

"I have already asked you to use your own judgment in that matter, my queen."

"But have you no choice in the affair?"

"I feel disposed to trust him with my sad story."

"Then I think you are right. He is indeed to be trusted!" she answered, earnestly.

At this moment, happening to look around his cell, and remembering its improvement:

"I have to thank you for all this, too," he said.

"Such trifles! Not worth mentioning!" she answered, with a smile.

"Trifles? Our daily comfort depends on trifles," he remarked.

"Has Warden Miltimore told you of all the debt of

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gratitude he owes your father?" Roma inquired, with a view to change the subject.

"Only in general terms he has acknowledged that he had reason to be grateful to my father for many acts of kindness shown him," Harcourt replied.

"Then I will tell you," Roma said. And then, thinking that the story might gratify the unhappy young man, she related all the reminiscences of his father's kindness and benevolence that had been told her by Warden Miltimore.

Harcourt was touched and pleased.

"And so he shows his sense of Col. Everard Harcourt's goodness to himself by his own interest in and attention to his son," added Roma.

And then, as the great clock in the corridor told twelve, Miss Fronde arose, and said:

"I have an errand in the village. But I shall not be gone more than half an hour, and then I will return and stay with you as long as I can."

He looked up regretfully. She gave him her hand, which he raised to his lips. Then she renewed her promise and left the cell, leading little Owlet.

Her errand out was twofold—to leave Harcourt alone at the early dinner hour that he might take his solitary meal without the embarrassment of her own and the child's presence, and, also, to get a luncheon for herself and Owlet.

In the corridor they met the handbarrow wheeled along, with dinner for the other prisoners.

They left the jail with the same unlocking, unbolting, unbarring and unchaining, first of the door and then of the gate, that marked every entrance and exit to and from the place.

They went up the road until it merged into the village street, and they stopped at a confectioner's shop, where tea, and coffee, and new milk might be served to customers, as well as cake and candy.

They sat down to a little table, Miss Fronde ordered milk, bread and butter and sponge cake for Owlet, and a cup of tea for herself.

When they had partaken of these refreshments,

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and Roma had paid the absurdly small price asked by the Ceciltown confectioner, they went back to the prison, and were readmitted with the inevitable grating, rattling, falling and banging of locks, bolts, bars and chains.

"Oh! how much stone and iron! Oh! how much noise, and noise, and noise! It makes my head ache and my stomach ache, too!" whimpered Owlet, after they had passed all this and were walking along the corridor.

"I have no doubt it makes your head and heart ache, my poor, little girl. I ought not to have brought you here," said Miss Fronde.

"Oh, yes, you ought. I should pine away and die if you left me behind, after all that I have gone through. And if you can stand it, I can," the aged infant hastened to say.

They found Harcourt alone in his cell.

After a little while the question of his defense was resumed, and discussed until it was almost time for Miss Fronde and her little companion to take leave.

But before they thought of doing so, Keeper Estep came to the cell door and said:

"There are two reporters—one for a Washington paper, and one for a New York paper—who wish to see you. The warden says, if you prefer, you can see them in the sheriff's room."

"Ask them to excuse me altogether this afternoon. I am engaged, as you see," Harcourt replied.

"No," said Roma, speaking to Harcourt, but stopping the keeper by a gesture; "it is time for us to go, indeed."

"Why? Will you let these visitors hurry you away?"

"Not at all; but I must catch the half-past six o'clock train from here, if I can, to meet Mr. Merritt at Snowden at seven; for you know after six there is no other train from this place until nine."

"That is true."

"I shall bring our friend, Mr. Merritt, to see you

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to-morrow morning," she said, as she bade him good-by.

"You may tell those gentlemen that I will see them," said Harcourt, with a sigh of resignation.

"Where? Here, or in the sheriff's room?"

"In the sheriff's room," said Harcourt, as he arose to follow the keeper there.

CHAPTER XV

AMOS MERRITT TO THE RESCUE

When Miss Fronde and Owlet had left the prison they hurried along the highway until they reached the station, just in time to catch their train for Snowden. As they had return tickets, there was no delay at the agent's window.

They got in the train as it was about to start, and were soon flying eastward.

"I think you are a very good, little girl, Owlet, to sit so quietly in that sad place while Mr. Harcourt and myself talk of matters that you cannot be supposed to understand," said Miss Fronde, when they were comfortably settled side by side in their seats.

"Lady," said Owlet, lifting her solemn, brown eyes to Miss Fronde's face, "I want to ask you something: Why do you call me a good, little girl?"

"Why?" demanded Roma, with some curiosity, though half expecting some modest disclaimer from the child.

"Because I hate to be called a good, little girl. It sounds so soft and silly. Lady, if you think I'm possessed of common sense, say so, but please don't call me a good, little girl—A-h-h-h!" concluded Owlet, with an exclamation of disgust.

Roma sighed profoundly. There were moments when the proper training of this honest, truthful, affectionate, but most eccentric child was beyond her wisdom.

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She bent over and kissed her—that was all.

A rapid run of thirty minutes brought them to the little seaside station of Snowden.

Miss Fronde looked at her watch. It was five minutes past seven, and no sign of the other train. In some anxiety she left the car, leading Owlet by the hand, and entered the waiting room.

"Has the Washington train passed?" she inquired of a porter.

"No, mum. It is a little behind time, but is expected every minute," the man replied.

Even while he spoke the roar of the approaching engine was heard along the track, and the next moment the train rushed up to the station and stopped, with a great puffing and blowing, as if it was very much out of breath indeed.

Roma, leading Owlet, went to the door.

There, among the few passengers that got out upon the platform, was Mr. Merritt.

"How kind of you to come," she said, hurrying forward to meet him.

"How do you do, my dear? How do you do, Miss Catherine?" he exclaimed, throwing his duster over his left shoulder and taking his bag in his left hand, while he held out his right to the lady and then to the child. "But, good heavens, Roma! what have you been doing with yourself, my dear?" he suddenly demanded, shocked at the change he saw in his young client.

"Only losing a few nights' rest, Mr. Merritt. I am quite well. So is Owlet. But you look weary," Roma said.

"Have had a harassing week's work, my dear. But I hope to recuperate with a few days by the sea."

"I hope you will. The boat is waiting at the wharf to take us to the isle. Shall we walk down to it at once, or would you rather stop and rest in the waiting room a while?" Miss Fronde inquired.

"We will walk down to it at once, if you please, my dear," the lawyer replied, still scrutinizing her.

"'Losing a few nights' rest. That is all.' Break-

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ing her heart about the mess that young fool has got himself into. That such a glorious woman as Roma Fronde should care for such a poor fellow as Will Harcourt! But love delights in opposites, it is said," the lawyer ruminated, as they turned from the station and walked along the highroad leading into the village.

The few passengers who had got off the train with Mr. Merritt walked along the same road, and too near them to admit of any confidential conversation between the lawyer and the lady, until they had entered the village street, where the strangers, mostly villagers, began to drop off in the direction of their various homes.

On reaching Harrison's, the last of the travelers left the street and went into that haven of rest and refreshment, news and gossip.

Our party continued their way through the village, past all the houses and into the sandy road that led to the sea.

This road at this hour, and especially at this season, was deserted, so that they encountered not one human being.

"Now, my dear Roma, will you give me the particulars of this most lamentable event?" inquired Mr. Merritt, as he walked beside the lady, with no one else in company except the wise, little owl.

"Not yet, dear friend. Not here, and now. Let us wait until we have reached the isle, and you have had dinner and are rested and refreshed. Then I will submit Mr. Harcourt's own statement in writing to your judgment. This statement covers the whole ground," Roma replied.

"Then I should like to see it. There was quite a sensational account of the affair in this morning's papers. But one cannot always rely on these first reports. Did the young fellow really give himself up to justice when no one had accused him?"

"Yes, when no one even suspected him, except one villain, who was bound, for his own sake, not to expose him."

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"My dear Roma, was the man insane?"

"No. I thought so at the time I sent you the dispatch, however, but that was before I had seen him."

"You have seen him, then?"

"Yes. I was on my way to him when I stopped at the telegraph office to send you the dispatch. I spent the whole day with him yesterday and to-day."

"My dear, Quixotic Roma!"

"Yes, and so did I!" exclaimed little Owlet, slipping into the conversation at the first opportunity.

"That was right. I am glad you went with Miss Fronde," said the lawyer.

"Why, of course it was right. Do you suppose that I would let Lady go to that howid place all by her lone self?"

"Is it such a horrid place, then, Miss Catherine?"

"'Howid!' Oh, don't talk! It makes my head ache and my breast ache, too. I wouldn't go there for a dollar only on Lady's account. For, of course, you know I couldn't let Lady go there by her own lone self."

"No, indeed, you could not," quite sincerely assented the lawyer, in the interests of conventionality. Then, turning to Miss Fronde, he inquired:

"Since you have seen Harcourt, then, you feel well assured of his complete sanity?"

"Perfectly well assured. Although he has had enough of awful sorrow to have overwhelmed the reason of the strongest mind. All the abstraction, the gloom, the inconsistency of his conduct that we noticed when he was in Washington last autumn, and which my aunt, Mrs. Gray, did not hesitate to ascribe to incipient insanity, and which I attributed to incomplete convalescence, and all the unaccountable eccentricities of his conduct since that time, and which brought even me at length to the despairful conviction that he was hopelessly insane, can be reasonably explained by his own statement, which I shall put in your hands to-night," said Miss Fronde, as they reached the water side and came in sight of their boat, chained to a post of the wharf, but rock-

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ing on the sea, which was at high tide, and so deepening the slumber of the two boys who lay fast asleep in its bottom, like a couple of tired-out watchdogs.

It was Owlet who roused them up.

Without waiting for anyone to speak, she sprang away from Lady's hand, jumped down from the wharf into the boat, causing it to rock fearfully, and swooped upon them, laying one hand on Tom and the other on Titus, shaking them, and exclaiming:

"Wake up, you stupid things. Is this the way to mind the boat? If robbers had stole you and the boat, too, and rowed you off to Guinea, and sold you to the Turks, it would have just served you right, for you are not possessed of common sense, and never will be."

Before Owlet had finished her jeremiad, both Tom and Titus had roused themselves, and had shaken their faculties into working order.

Titus spoke first:

"Oh, I'm just awful sorry we went to sleep on our post, mum. I know what soldiers and sailors have to expect when they fall asleep on their watch, mum. But, you see, mum——"

Here Tom broke in:

"It was so hot here in the sun, 'side ob de w'arf, an' w'en de tide come in an' lif' de boat higher and higher, an' it began to yock like a baby c'adle, an' we so warm, an' so heaby an' so d'owsy, we couldn' help ob goin' to s'eep, youn' mist'ess, ma'am. No, not ef we was to be kill' fo' it."

"What is the matter with you three?" inquired Miss Fronde. "Owlet, dear, neither the boat nor the boys were in any danger. Titus, my lad, you were not subject to martial or naval law. As for you, Tom, the best thing for you, under the circumstances, was to fall asleep. There is no harm done," she added, as she stepped into the boat after Owlet, and invited Mr. Merritt to follow.

"Now, boys, loose the boat and take the oars. The tide has turned, and there is a fresh breeze springing

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up from the west. We shall have a fine row over the bay!" she said.

The two lads politely touched their caps to Mr. Merritt, and then proceeded to unhook the chain from the staple in the wharf post, drop it into the bottom of the boat, and take up their oars.

They laid themselves heartily to the stroke, and sent the little boat flying over the water.

As they sped on, the lawyer and his client, who sat side by side in the stern of the boat, had a good opportunity for a confidential conversation, if they had both been inclined to enter upon one; for the whole attention of the boys was given to their oars, and Owlet's mind was absorbed in watching them.

But Miss Fronde answered every question and every suggestive remark from her old friend, touching the subject of Harcourt's case, by a reference to Harcourt's statement, which she had promised to put in his hands after dinner that evening.

"Well, then," he said, at length, "I have something on my side to communicate to you, which does not, I think, relate in any way to the deferred subject. And there is no better time in which to speak of it than the present."

"Well! What is it, Mr. Merritt? Pray, speak out. I am quite ready to hear."

"I have received a letter from—— Whom do you suppose? But you could never guess."

"Then do not let me lose precious time in trying to do so; but tell me at once."

"Then it was from your school friend, Miss Bushe."

"Reba Bushe! I thought she was in Europe, with her mother!"

"Her mother, my dear, died in Rome, of the Roman fever, about one month ago, she writes," gravely replied the lawyer.

"Oh! what a shock! I am so sorry! What a blow to her daughter! Poor, poor Reba! Ah! if I were only free from these living sorrows worse than any that come from death, I would go to her immediately. I would bring her home with me! But why did she

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write to you, Mr. Merritt? She only knows you as my late guardian and present lawyer. There must have been some special reason for her doing so."

"There was a special reason. It was on your account she wrote to me. She wished to know your local address, and also by what name she should address you."

"What!" exclaimed Miss Fronde. "Is it possible that Reba Bushe can have heard any report to suggest that question, Mr. Merritt?"

"Yes, my dear, I grieve to say that she has. We did our best, as you know, to keep that very painful and embarrassing business out of the newspapers on her and on her mother's account. The case was heard in chambers, as you know. And decided in chambers, as I know. There was not a reporter or any outsiders present on either occasion. And though we succeeded in keeping the case out of the papers, we could not succeed in keeping it away from the gossips. And the result is that your friend has heard as true and particular an account of the fraud practiced by her scoundrelly brother as if we had taken her into our confidence from the first."

"Oh, how could she have heard it? How could it have got out?" demanded Miss Fronde.

"I told you, my dear young lady, that there were clerks. It must have been through them, or one of them, that the story leaked out. One of them, let us say, told his wife in the strictest confidence. She told her mother, also in confidence, and her mother told her neighbors, still and forever under the most solemn pledge of secrecy. And so the story became public property. Miss Bushe did not tell me who her immediate informant was, but alluded to the affair as a common rumor. She entreated me to contradict or corroborate it, as the case might require, for she insisted that she wished to know the truth."

"Have you answered her letter?"

"No, my dear. I only took it out of the post office this morning, when I stopped on my way from my lodgings to the depot. Nor would I, in any case, have

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answered it without first having consulted you. I read it carefully while in the car. I have it now in my pocket. Would you like to see it?"

"Not now, or here. I will wait until after dinner. While you are reading Will Harcourt's statement, I will read and reply to Reba Bushe's letter."

"You will reply to it, my dear!" exclaimed the lawyer.

"Yes, it is much better that I should do so."

"But it will be awkward and embarrassing to you. What will you tell her?"

"The truth, as gently and kindly as I can present it. And I now know much more of that truth than you do or can, until you shall have read Will Harcourt's statement."

"Upon the whole, I think you are quite right, my dear, to answer the letter yourself," the lawyer continued.

They were now much more than halfway between the mainland and the island, speeding over the blue water, with the tide in their favor, and a fine breeze blowing behind them.

"This is enough to blow away all the dust and cobwebs of courts and offices out of a poor lawyer's brain. Eh, Roma, my dear?" Mr. Merritt demanded.

"Oh, yes, indeed. And I hope this air may benefit you, dear friend, and many others besides," she cordially responded.

"And, by the way, that reminds me. How does your project for a sanitarium progress?"

"Three days ago I completed all the preparations for receiving the little patients and their nurses. On the last day I wrote to the physicians of the poor for the District of Columbia, asking them to send me any destitute sick children whom they might think likely to be benefited by the sea air, with their mothers, or with competent nurses, and to draw on me for the necessary funds to pay traveling and other expenses. I referred them to several leading citizens of Washington for my personal and financial responsibility. I charged our mutual friend, Dr. Washburn,

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with the care of procuring a competent house physician."

"That was prompt. But just suppose a small regiment of sick children and nurses should arrive by the steamer this evening, in the midst of all your present trouble?"

"I should be quite ready for them. But I do not anticipate such a sudden arrival. Dr. Washburn has promised to telegraph me when the first party shall start. He will try to send a house physician with them. I have an arrangement with the telegraph office at Snowden, by which they undertake to send me any dispatch that may come for me by a special messenger to the isle. So I cannot be taken by surprise."

"Oh, Roma, my child! what an Atlas' load of cares and responsibilities you have taken on your young shoulders."

"I do not feel them, except as a positive relief. I do not feel any care but the care of Will Harcourt. Oh, dear friend, it is well I have this sanitarium on the isle and the free colored school at Goerberlin to think about, to prevent me from brooding too morbidly over the incurable trouble we have now to deal with."

They had drawn so near the isle now that a few vigorous strokes of the oars sent the little boat ashore.

Mr. Merritt sprang out, and offered his hand to Miss Fronde.

Roma just touched it, and stepped lightly down to the sands, followed by Owlet.

"I leave the boat in your charge, boys. See that you get it into the boathouse, and put it away safely," said Miss Fronde.

Tom and Titus outrivaled each other in protestations of care and fidelity.

The lawyer gave his arm to the lady, and they began to ascend the cliff, followed by Owlet, who sometimes lingered behind, then walked beside them or ran on before, as the whim moved her.

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When they reached the house, who should be there to open the door for them but old 'Rusalem, "clothed and in his right mind," looking rather ashamed of himself, though he tried to put a brave face on the situation.

"Ebenin', young mist'ess. Ebenin', ole marster. Ebenin', Miss Cafferine," he said, bowing and scraping. "'Deed, young mist'ess, I's mons'ous sorry as a sarus 'tack ob yeumatiz 'vented ob me f'om doin' ob my dooty yistidy an' dis mornin'. But t'ank de Lord fo' all his messies, I's yeady to wait on de table dis ebenin', ma'am."

"I am glad that you are better, Jerusalem. And I sincerely hope that you will never have such another attack as that of yesterday," gravely replied Miss Fronde.

"T'anky, youn' mist'ess. 'Deed, I hope so, too. An' I beliebes as I nebber shall hab anoder 'tack ef I could get my g'og reg'lar free times a day, like I used to hab it in ole Marse Henwy Gwine's time," the old scamp had the assurance to add.

"Do you mean to say that my grandfather allowed you grog three times a day?" incredulously demanded Miss Fronde.

"Yes, youn' mist'ess, he did dat. W'en it warn't fo' or fibe times a day! He knowed as it were good for my healf an' kep' off de yeumatiz! I fink, youn' mist'ess, how ef yo' would get in a s'ply ob yeal good likker, an' leabe me take care ob it fo' you, an' keep de keys ob de cellar, an' take a jink w'en I feel like it, I shouldn' hab dese yere sarus 'tacks ob yeumatiz."

Miss Fronde looked at him in wonder. Southern woman as she was, she had lived all through her girlhood in Northern boarding schools, and had but too recently come into her estates to become thoroughly acquainted with the negro character, with its inconsistencies of vice and virtue, devotion and hypocrisy, cunning and stupidity too often to be found migled in the same individual.

Instead of replying to the man's impudent proposal, she said:

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"Do you not see that you are keeping us standing outside while you fill up the doorway?"

"Oh, Lor'! So I is! I begs ten t'ousan' pardins, youn' mist'ess an' ole marse, an' Miss Cafferine, too," exclaimed the old man, as he stood aside, bowing and scraping, while the party passed through.

"Show this gentleman upstairs to the front room, over the parlor, and see that he has hot and cold water, towels, and all that he may require."

"Ye-yes, ma'am. Ye-es, sah," eagerly exclaimed 'Rusalem, anxious to atone for his first offense against politeness.

"He will attend punctually to your requirements, Mr. Merritt, of that I can assure you. Do not hesitate to call on him for anything you may wish."

"Yes, yo' may dat, ole marse. Anyfing yo' 'quire. An' a bottle ob good b'andy. Woane I fetch you a bottle of good b'andy?" insinuatingly inquired the old man, as he took the traveling bag and duster from the hands of the visitor.

"No, thank you, Jerusalem, if that is your name," said Mr. Merritt, smiling.

"W'ich it is my name, sah. Yes, sah. An' w'ich I 'umbly hope as dat pious name hab keeped me in a state ob g'ace, all de days ob de yea's ob my pilg'imidge on de yeath. Yes, sah. Now woane I b'ing yo' de b'andy bottle up, sah? Marse Henwy Gwine, sah, usen allers to sen' a bottle of b'andy up to de yooms ob his gemman wissiters. An' w'ich nobody ebber knowed de callin' ob a gemman in his own house mo'n he. Now woane I b'ing yo' a bottle ob b'andy, sah?"

"No, I thank you."

"Not arter de 'tigues ob yo' journey, sah?" persisted the negro.

"No, Jerusalem," said the old lawyer, with something like a grim smile lurking around his mouth. "For the fact is that I dare not! If I should take one glass of brandy, I might—I do not say I would—but I might be tempted to take more than would be good for me. So I had better abstain."

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"Ef dat is so, sah, it is a berry g'eat pity. Some w'ite gemman is dat away. Dey ain't go no 'trol ober deirselves, an' ain't fit to be trus' 'long ob likker. Dat is so," said 'Rusalem, solemnly shaking his head.

"Do you not see that Mr. Merritt wishes to go to his room? Show him up at once," said Miss Fronde.

"Sartinly! Sartinly, ma'am!" promptly exclaimed the old man. "Dis is de way, ole marse! Yight up dese yere stairs, an' den turn to de yight ag'in, an' dere yo' is! An' I follys yo' up wid yo' bag," he added, bowing and scraping, and waving his hand for the guest to take precedence.

Mr. Merritt smiled, and ascended.

Miss Fronde turned into her sitting room, and rang for Violet, who made her appearance.

"Well, Violet, I am glad to see that Jerusalem has recovered."

"Yes, mist'ess, he's 'covered arter a fashun; but just as c'azy arter jink as if he hadn' had a drap fo' a year."

"More so, I fancy."

"Dat's so, I do reckon, ma'am."

"But he must not have any more."

"No, not to sabe his life, he mus'n', an' he shan't, de ole sinner."

"I hope you did not forget that Mr. Merritt was to come down here to spend a few days, Violet, and to make preparations for his comfort?"

"Hi! youn' mist'ess, who yo' finks a fool?"

"I suppose that means that everything is done. But I was not sure, with that intoxicated old man on your mind, that you would remember. And I had sent Mr. Merritt upstairs, attended by Jerusalem, without stopping to reflect whether the room was ready for him or not. I am glad it was ready."

"Youn' mist'ess, yo' may 'pend on me ebery time."

"Very well, then. When will dinner be ready?"

"It yeady now, ma'am. Yeady an' waiting to be put on de table."

"I am going upstairs to change my dress. When I come down I will ring for it."

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"All yight, ma'am. I'll see to it. But jus' le' me ax yo' one question fo' yo' go, ma'am."

"What is it?"

"How did you fine dat misfortunate youn' gemman?"

"Mr. Harcourt is as well as anyone could be under such unhappy circumstances," gravely replied Miss Fronde.

"Well, thank de Lord for dat much, anyhow!" said Wilet.

Roma hurried upstairs, followed by Owlet, to prepare for dinner.

Twenty minutes later the small party met in the parlor, and Roma rang for the late meal to be set upon the table.

Mr. Merritt, with his old-fashioned formality, seldom abandoned, even on the most informal occasions, gave his arm to Miss Fronde to take her to the dining room.

After dinner, when the party were reassembled in the lighted parlor, Titus asked leave to go down to the fishing landing, to help the men with their seines.

Miss Fronde readily granted it, and with his polite bow, he left the room and went.

Little Owlet began to show signs of fatigue and drowsiness.

Roma excused herself to her old friend, and took the child upstairs.

Owlet insisted on undressing herself, as usual, but could scarcely keep awake during the process, and actually fell asleep while saying her prayers at Roma's knees.

The lady gently lifted the child and laid her in the bed.

Leaving Owlet sound asleep, Miss Fronde returned to the parlor, where she found Mr. Merritt carelessly glancing over an evening paper which he had brought on the cars, just before reaching Snowden.

He laid it down as she entered the room.

Roma had brought the manuscript statement of Will Harcourt down in her hand.

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She gave it to him, saying:

"In submitting this confession to your judgment, I must entreat you, while reading its dreadful details, to bear in mind the almost irresistible temptation, amounting almost to predestination, of the man's surroundings and situation. And I must beg you also to bear in mind his long anguish of remorse and humiliation, borne all through the last eight months in secret for his mother's sake. And lastly, I ask you to think of the atonement he is now trying to make, by giving his life or liberty in satisfaction for his sin, and so to judge him justly, not harshly."

"You are a very special pleader, Roma, my dear," said the non-committing lawyer, as he took the manuscript from her hand. "I will take this up to my room, and read it there in solitude. And now, if you will excuse me for the remainder of the evening, I will say good-night. When I shall have read this statement, as I shall have done before I go to bed, and when I have slept upon it, I shall be better prepared to give you an opinion of the case in the morning."

"But give me Reba Bushe's letter before you go. I wish to read and answer it," said Roma.

"Ah, dear me, I had quite forgotten all about it," exclaimed Mr. Merritt, as he drew the letter from his breast pocket, and handed it to Miss Fronde.

Then the friends exchanged good-nights and parted.

Mr. Merritt went upstairs to his room, to read and study in solitude Harcourt's statement.

Roma sat down in her easy-chair beside the center table, drew the moderator lamp to her side, opened Reba's letter, and began to read it.

It contained nothing that the lawyer had not already reported of it.

When she had finished it, she drew her little writing case before her, and began to answer it by telling the truth as gently as she could.

But in the necessary allusion to Harcourt's complicity in the fraud that had been practiced upon her, she realized anew the deepness of the degradation

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into which he had been drawn with a pang keener than death.

Yet she never dreamed of deserting the repentant sinner.

CHAPTER XVI

THE LAWYER LEARNS THE TRUTH

"After breakfast, my dear—after breakfast," said Mr. Merritt, in answer to Roma's appealing look, when they met in the parlor.

"But I am going to Ceciltown immediately after breakfast," replied Miss Fronde.

"Roma, my dear, you had better let me go there alone to-day."

"No, I cannot, because I promised Will Harcourt to bring you to see him this morning."

"But cannot I go without being carried?"

"Doubtless; only if I were not to go with you he would be disappointed."

"Very well; then I will say what I have to say now, Miss Fronde."

"Say on, Mr. Merritt."

"Then I think you are insanely Quixotic in your devotion to that young man, who, to say the least and kindest of him and his deeds, has shown himself to be criminally weak," said the lawyer, severely.

"Oh, Mr. Merritt, you are unjust and cruel in your judgment," exclaimed the lady.

"No, my dear. He has proved himself to be criminally weak from first to last. First, in having allowed himself to be drawn into gambling and drinking to excess; then into risking another man's money. All that followed were the acts of delirium, for which he was scarcely morally, though entirely legally, responsible."

"But you have seen how he was led on by diabolical art from step to step. He, a mere boy, in the power of a modern Mephistopheles. You have seen his

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bitter repentance, proved by giving himself up to justice when no one accused him, no one suspected him," pleaded Roma.

"Yes, my dear. And he was weak even in that. He has been weak all through—weak from first to last. Weak in suffering himself to be led into temptation, weak in falling into sin, weak in being unable to bear in silence the burden of remorse, weak in giving himself up to justice, just to acquire some peace of conscience, at the cost of causing infinite sorrow and humiliation to the innocent who love or care for him. He should have borne his burden of remorse in utter silence, since such silence could have injured no one—since no one else was suspected of any connection with Yelverton's death. His confession has done no good to any human being except to himself, in relieving his conscience; but it has done infinite harm to others."

"Oh, Mr. Merritt! Whom has it harmed, except his own poor, forlorn, friendless self?" tearfully said Roma.

"You, first of all—you, most of all—and through you all who love you, and must suffer in seeing you suffer. Before this unfortunate young donkey brought himself to your notice again——"

"Oh, Mr. Merritt, he did not bring himself, in any manner, to my notice. I heard of his surrender. I called at the prison to see him. He was amazed and overwhelmed at the sight of me."

"Pardon me, Roma. In surrendering himself to justice, and accusing himself of crime of which neither he nor anyone else was suspected, merely to ease his own conscience, he forced himself most obtrusively on your attention; and not only on yours, but on that of the whole country. Whether he ever intended to do so or not, I cannot say, but he will pose as a hero, my dear. When the truth as to the manner of the blackleg's death is made known, only through the testimony of the self-accused man—when Harcourt tells his own story on the witness stand, as he certainly will, in the same candid, straightforward

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manner in which he has told it in his written statement—I doubt if there be a jury to be found who would be willing to convict him."

"Oh, Mr. Merritt!" Roma exclaimed, starting to her feet and clasping his hand. "If I thought he could be acquitted, I should be the happiest woman in the world!"

"Roma! Roma! You continually surprise and distress me. What, in the name of Heaven, may I ask, can you see in this weak young man to make you care for him as you do?"

"I do not know. But he is dearer to me than all else in life. I deny that Will Harcourt is weak. I am glad, glad that he could not bear the burden of remorse. I am glad he surrendered and accused himself. And, if, after all, a jury of his fellow citizens should acquit him, I shall be the happiest creature in the Lord's universe."

"And marry him, I suppose," grimly observed the lawyer.

"Yes," Roma quietly replied, "I shall marry him, and do my best to help him to make his life a good and useful one."

"Miss Fronde, you are mad!" exclaimed the lawyer, starting up and pacing the floor.

"Mr. Merritt, I am very sorry that I troubled you to come down here. I see that, from your point of view, you can do nothing for Will Harcourt," said Roma.

"My dear, you are mistaken. I may lament your resolution to marry this man when he shall be at large, but I will do all I can for him," said the old lawyer, coming back and sitting down beside her. "I will hunt up, engage and coach—on this case—the best counsel to be found in the State. And, of course, money will be no consideration with you, who have more of it than you know what to do with."

"No," said Roma; "if you allude to the necessary funds for retaining counsel, money will not be limited. I leave it all to you, dear friend. Draw on me at sight for any amount at any time."

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"Well, my dear, mad girl, I think you may reasonably hope for a happy termination of young Harcourt's trial. His own good character; the gross injury and provocation he received from Yelverton, a man of notoriously bad character; his final act in surrendering and accusing himself, will—in the hands of such counsel as I hope to retain—be most potent arguments in his defense, and must influence the jury in his favor, and may lead to an acquittal."

"Oh, Mr. Merritt, if this should be, I shall thank and bless you all the days of my life. And you may call me a lunatic, and my poor Will an idiot, as often as you please," said Roma, smiling through the tearful pallor of her face.

"I shall take satisfaction in largely availing myself of the privilege," replied the lawyer, grimly.

The ringing of the breakfast bell broke up the conversation.

Miss Fronde invited her guest to follow her out on the green lawn, where, under the shade of a great, spreading walnut tree, the breakfast table was set.

"This is delightful!" exclaimed the wearied city lawyer, as he sank into the large easy-chair that had been placed for him at the foot of the table. Roma took her seat at the head, with Owlet to her right hand and Titus on her left.

Jerusalem stood behind his mistress to wait on the table.

Mr. Merritt asked the blessing. And the pleasant "al fresco" repast began.

"Have you got the boat ready, Titus?" inquired Miss Fronde, when the coffee was served to the guest, and new milk to the boy and girl.

"Oh, yes, mum. Me and Tom got her out in high time this morning. Me and Tom cleaned her out. She's nice and dry by now. She's chained fast to the post, and floating on the water like an angel, mum," proudly replied the boy.

"Did you ever see an angel float, Titus?" inquired Owlet, stretching her big, brown eyes at the boy.

"No, Miss Catherine, only in picters. But there

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they did seem to float most lovely, you know," said the boy, deprecatingly.

"No, I don't know. And picters ain't true. No more are stories. I didn't think you'd say things that wasn't true, Titus Blair," said Owlet, severely.

"'Deed, I'm awfully sorry, Miss Catherine. I didn't mean no harm. I only wanted to say how lovely the boat floated, and I could only think to say she floated like an angel."

"There you go again. 'She!' Titus Blair, I'm afraid you can't tell the truth, nohow. 'She!' The boat ain't a woman, nor yet a little girl, to be called 'she.' Ain't you afraid of going to the dark world for saying things that are not true?"

Titus made no reply, but looked so miserable that Mr. Merritt came to his relief with a remark:

"I fear, Miss Catherine, if all persons who indulge in poetical figures of speech are consigned to the dark world, that world will be so full of bright wits that it will be so illuminated as to outshine all other worlds."

Owlet looked at the speaker in the most solemn disapprobation for a full minute, and then she said:

"Well, Lady has been talking to me 'bout 'spect jue to old people. So I must not say anything to you. But I know what I think, all the same, 'spect or no 'spect."

"Good gracious, I scarcely thank you, or Lady either, for placing me on that list before my time," exclaimed the well-preserved old gentleman, half in amusement, half in annoyance. "But come, Miss Nouvellini. Irrespective of the question of antiquity, I should like to hear that suppressed wisdom of yours freely uttered."

"I don't know what you are talking about no more than the man in the moon," said Owlet.

"I mean I should like to hear you speak your mind without thinking of me," Mr. Merritt exclaimed.

"Well, you can't, then. I mean to 'bey Lady, and 'spect old age," said Owlet.

"Perdition, young woman! I'm not 'Old Age',"

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laughed the lawyer. "But, come now, tell me what you were keeping to yourself."

"No. It wouldn't be any use. It wouldn't do any good. It never did. I'm discozzened sometimes," said Owlet, with a heavy sigh.

"That is a great pity. I hope, however, that you will not quite give up the cause of a sinning and suffering world," said the lawyer.

Owlet looked at him in hopeless dismay for a moment, and then turned and appealed to Roma.

"You hear how he goes on, Lady? If he carries on in that way, how can I keep up my 'spects for old age?"

Her question remained unanswered, as the party had finished breakfast, and Miss Fronde—to avoid replying, perhaps—gave the signal to rise from the table.

"I must apologize for my poor little savage, Mr. Merritt. She has never had any proper training, and I am only beginning gradually to teach her," said Miss Fronde, as the two walked together toward the house.

"Don't say a word more, my dear. 'Those who play with children must take children's play,' as the old proverb has it," said the lawyer, smiling, as they entered the hall.

"The boat is waiting for us, Mr. Merritt. I shall be ready in five minutes. But I do not want to hurry you," Roma said.

"I am quite ready now, my dear. I have only to snatch up my hat and gloves. But, Roma, I wish to say this to you in advance: When you have 'taken' me, as you term it, to Harcourt's cell, I wish you, after a short stay, to leave him and myself together, for I can talk with him much more effectually alone."

"Very well, Mr. Merritt. Only promise to be considerate—not to 'break the bruised reed, or quench the smoking flax'."

"I will not, my dear. Nor will he give me the opportunity, to judge by his recent utterances; he will daze and deafen me with his own self-reproaches.

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I shall have to defend him against himself in my own self-defense," said the lawyer.

Roma went upstairs, followed by Owlet, but they soon returned, dressed for their trip across the bay.

Old 'Rusalem met them in the hall.

He touched his forehead by way of salute, and said:

"Youn' mist'ess, ma'am, I's berry sorry I's got to make a 'plaint 'gainst dem dere boys."

"A complaint against my good boys! What is it, Jerusalem? It seems to me quite impossible that they should have given you cause of offense," said Miss Fronde.

"Youn' mist'ess," said 'Rusalem, with solemn dignity, "dem two youn' rascals is too impident fo' anyfing in dis worl'! Dey is too impident to be let live! Dat dey is! Dey's come an' gone an' tell me to my face as I shan't yow my own boat! As dey's gwine to yow it."

"Well, Jerusalem, they are to row it from this time forth! You are much too subject to attacks of 'rheumatism' to be called on for that service."

"Name o' de Lor'! is dis 'sgrace come on to me in de wenable ole ages of my pilg'imidge on yeth!" groaned the old sinner, clasping his hands and raising his eyes to heaven. "Not to be teeusted to yow my own boat as I've yowed ebber since it was builted!"

"If you can't row your 'own' boat, you can stay home and take care of your own house, where you have lived ever since you were born! And that is the best you can do for me and the most responsible duty of the two," said Miss Fronde, by way of soothing his wounded self-esteem.

"Yes, youn' mist'ess, ma'am, dat is yeally so, 'ticklar w'en dere's nobody lef' 'bout de p'ace but foolish women, like Lucy an' Wilet," gravely assented 'Rusalem, accepting the trust, though sorely disappointed in his hope of getting over to Snowden to contract another attack of rheumatism.

"Then take good care of your 'own' house while I am gone. Good-morning," said Miss Fronde, as she

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took Owlet's hand and led the way from the house down the cliff, followed closely by Mr. Merritt.

When they reached the sands, they found the boat chained to the staple in the post, and rocking on the water at high tide.

Tom and Titus were seated at each end of the little skiff; but on seeing their party, both started up and stood at attention.

"So you have had a visit from Jerusalem," said Miss Fronde, as she settled herself in her seat in the stern of the boat, and drew her little companion down beside her.

"Yes, mum. And I just thought as how he would have scalped me and Tom, he was so mad. He was the werry maddest man as ever I see. Me and Tom had to loose the boat and put out to sea. And even then he hev stones at us as long as ever he could hold out. We had to row for our lives, I tell you, mum," said Titus.

"Yes, mist'ess, ma'am. An' jus' yo' look at dis bump on de top ob de back ob my head wot he made, flingin' a stone at me an' hittin' me dere!" said Tom, pointing to the huge swelling.

"I am very sorry that the old man should have had no more control over his temper, and sorrier still you should have been so seriously hurt, Tom, my boy."

"Oh, it doane hurt so berry bad now, mist'ess, ma'am, w'ich I do 'spose as de po' ole gemman were hurted into his own feelin's fus' off, or he wouldn't 'a' did it," generously replied the lad.

"Yes, that is true, Tom; he was. And it is very good of you to think of it. Now, boys, take your oars and push off."

The lads obeyed, and the little skiff was soon skimming the surface of the water.

Every circumstance of wind and tide was in their favor, and the lads were improving in the use of the oars, so in something less than half an hour they touched the wharf at Snowden.

Miss Fronde looked at her watch, and said:

"I hope you can walk fast, Mr. Merritt, or we may

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miss the train, and have to wait three hours in town here before we can get another."

"Shall we arrange a walking match for a wager? I think I might run you close for a victory," said the lawyer.

"Come along, then!" exclaimed Roma, hurrying off, and drawing little Owlet after her, without even stopping to give the boys a parting injunction—though, indeed, now she would have considered such a precaution unnecessary and even inexpedient, as it might have been understood by the lads as conveying some want of confidence in them, while, in fact, she wished to give them the healthful, moral influence of feeling the responsibility of unconditional trust reposed in their fidelity.

Mr. Merritt took the other hand of little Owlet and, holding it firmly, hurried her along.

The three walked so fast that at the end of twenty minutes they reached the depot, just in time to catch their train "on the fly."

"You are getting to be a great traveler, Miss Catherine," said Mr. Merritt, as they took their seats, and the train rushed onward.

"Oh, yes," frankly admitted Owlet, "I have spent most of my life in traveling."

"You will perhaps write a book of travels some of these days."

"No, I think not," thoughtfully replied Owlet. "I shall marry and settle."

"Oh, indeed! May I inquire who is the favored swain?"

"The what?"

"The happy man."

"Which happy man?"

"The one you mean to marry."

"Oh, I don't know yet! I haven't made up my mind. Maybe Titus, when he grows up, and maybe you, if you will have me," said Owlet, reflectively.

"I am honored," said the old gentleman, lifting his hat.

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"Tickets!" shouted the conductor, and stopped the conversation.

This was the express train, and in less than thirty minutes it rushed into the depot at Ceciltown.

"Now you will see things!" said Owlet to the lawyer, as they left the train and turned down the road leading to the prison, and she looked up in his face with an expression of anticipating his astonishment.

"I, too, have traveled in my day, Miss Catherine, and I have also seen some 'things' myself," said the lawyer, with a laugh.

"Have you, though? Yes, but you haven't been in jail!"

"Except as a visitor, no."

"And you haven't been in our jail?"

"Never."

"Well, there it is. Look at it," she said, pointing to the huge, gray stone bulding, with its iron-grated windows and high stone wall that loomed upon the left-hand side of the road before them.

"It is a stronghold indeed," said Mr. Merritt.

"And only look at the gate!"

"It is well secured."

They walked on, and soon reached the prison.

With the usual inevitable unlocking, unbolting, unbarring and unchaining, they were admitted through gate and door, and entered the corridor.

The warden was standing just outside the office door, talking to one of the keepers.

As soon as he saw Miss Fronde and her party, he came forward to meet her.

She responded to his greeting, and then introduced Mr. Merritt, with whom the genial warden shook hands.

"Can we go at once to see Mr. Harcourt?" she inquired.

"Certainly, my dear young lady, if you wish to do so; but I should warn you that there are three representatives of the press with him at this moment, and you might not care to meet them."

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"No, I'd rather not," said Roma.

"Will you sit down in the sheriff's room? It is unoccupied at this hour."

"Thank you," said Miss Fronde. Then, turning to Mr. Merritt, she inquired:

"Shall we wait there?"

"Certainly, if you please, my dear," he answered.

The warden crossed the hall and opened the door for the little party, who entered and took seats.

"Do you think these visitors will keep Mr. Harcourt long?" inquired Lawyer Merritt of Warden Miltimore.

"Not much longer, I should think. They have been with him for the last hour."

Even as the warden spoke voices were heard coming from the direction of Harcourt's cell, and soon the three strangers were seen to emerge and come down the corridor.

"There they go," said the warden, as the visitors passed out, under the escort of a keeper. "Now will you see Mr. Harcourt here, or will you go to his cell?" he inquired.

"We will see him here, if you please," Mr. Miltimore," Miss Fronde replied.

The warden went out, and soon returned with Harcourt.

Roma went forward to meet him first, looked anxiously in his face, saw that his countenance was calmer than it had been on any preceding day on which she had seen him since his incarceration, and said:

"You are much better, Will, thank Heaven! Come and see a friend." And she presented him to Lawyer Merritt, who greeted him in a friendly manner, and said:

"I am very sorry to see you under such unhappy circumstances, Mr. Harcourt."

"Thank you," said the young man.

The warden withdrew, and left the parties together.

Lawyer Merritt inquired of Harcourt whether he

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had engaged counsel; and, being answered in the negative, further inquired whether he had any preferences among the members of the Maryland bar; answered again in the negative, the lawyer submitted the names of some half dozen of the most distinguished barristers in the State for Harcourt to choose from.

The young man admitted that he knew so little of the relative merits of these lawyers as to be unable to make any selection.

They talked further, and their tones were sinking lower, when Miss Fronde, recollecting Mr. Merritt's expressed desire that he should be left alone with Harcourt, arose and said:

"Our friend here has admonished me that he should be able to serve you more effectually if left to consult with you 'tete-a-tete.' So I will bid you good-by for the present, only to return in the morning."

She took leave of Harcourt, nodded and smiled "au revoir" to Mr. Merritt, and, leading Owlet, was leaving the room, when, as if she had suddenly remembered something, she returned, and said:

"By the way, Mr. Merritt, when shall I send the boat for you?"

"You need not send it at all, my dear. It is impossible for me now to say precisely when I shall return. When I am ready to do so, I can easily engage a boat and boatman from the wharf," the lawyer replied:

"Very well," said Miss Fronde; and, with a parting smile bestowed on Harcourt, she turned again to go.

"Good-by, Mr. William! I wish you was going home with Lady and me!" said Owlet, holding out her little hand.

"Good-by, little owl! I wish with all my heart I was!" said Harcourt.

Roma left the room, leading Owlet.

They passed through door and gate with the usual clang, rattle and bang that invariably drove Owlet almost wild, and found themselves on the highway.

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They walked leisurely to the depot, and then had to wait there an hour for a train to Snowden.

It was twelve, noon, when they left Ceciltown, and as this was the slowest train on the line, stopping at every station on the road, it was one o'clock in the afternoon before they reached Snowden.

They went straight down the road and through the village. They called at the post office to get the mail, and then, without stopping to open any of the letters or papers, walked on to the water side, where they found the boat chained, but afloat, and the two boys seated in it, playing checkers.

"We didn't fall asleep on our posts this time, mum," said Titus, with justifiable pride.

"I see you did not, my boys. Now loose the chain, and let us get back to the isle as quickly as possible," said Miss Fronde, as she stepped into the little craft, followed by Owlet.

The lads unhooked the chain, dropped it in the bottom of the boat, sat down, took their oars, pushed off, and sped away over the blue waters of the bay.

They reached the isle by two o'clock.

After luncheon, Roma opened her mail, but found nothing of importance.

She then set Owlet and Titus down to their lessons, and took up one of the magazines that she had brought from the post office, and cut the leaves and tried to read, but her attention wandered.

Then she took up her knitting, and in that monotonous employment her thoughts were free.

The afternoon passed very quietly.

Just as she was thinking that it was time for Mr. Merritt to make his appearance, she looked through the window out to sea, and saw a boat approaching the isle.

Believing that it was the lawyer's hired boat, she arose, threw a scarf over her head, and went out of the house and down the cliff to receive him on the beach.

But when the boat drew near, she saw in it, beside

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the boatman, only the boy who sometimes brought her telegrams from the Snowden office.

She went to the edge of the sands to wait for the landing of the boat, and see what news it brought her.

She thought this must be Dr. Washburn's promised telegram, announcing the embarkation of the first "assignment" of babies and nurses to the sanitarium.

The boat touched the sands, and the boy jumped on shore and handed her—not the expected telegram, but a letter in the handwriting of Mr. Merritt.

"Don't 'quire of an answer. The ge'man told me so," said the boy, preparing to leave.

"Come to the house with me. I may wish to answer this, whether it requires an answer or not," said Miss Fronde, leading the way up the cliff, followed by the messenger.

When they reached the piazza, she told him to sit down and wait while she read the letter.

She sank into her Quaker rocking-chair, and opened it, and read as follows:

"SNOWDEN, Friday, 6 P. M.

"MY DEAR ROMA: I have had a long and exhaustive interview with William Harcourt. I understand him better, think more favorably of him and feel more interested in him than heretofore. It was, however, only by the sharpest cross-examination that I succeeded in getting the favorable points in his case from him, so little was he inclined to palliate his fault or to excuse himself. I am about to start by the next train for Baltimore, to see the celebrated barrister, Hiram Keneage, and endeavor to secure him for the defense. If I succeed, I shall ask him whom he would prefer for his associate counsel, and try to see the parties personally. Prompt action is necessary, as the grand jury meets next Monday, and the next term of the criminal court opens on the first Monday in next month. Therefore, as I have so much to do that I shall not be able to see you before Sunday, I shall come down by the Saturday night's train,

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and be in time to take breakfast and go to church with you. I feel profoundly sorry for young Harcourt, and shall do my very best for him. After I have seen Keneage and the others, I will telegraph you. Yours ever, AMOS MERRITT."

Roma was not disappointed. She was very glad that the lawyer had hurried off at once on Harcourt's business, instead of returning to the isle for the night, as he had expected to do.

She gave the boy some ripe cherries, just brought in by Tom, and dismissed him.

Owlet pleaded to be taken down to the "Vanishing Point," or the "Rattles of the Serpent," as Wilet called them. Miss Fronde complied with her request.

It was a long walk, and they only got back in time for supper and bed..

CHAPTER XVII

AN INVASION OF INFANTRY

THE next morning Roma, accompanied by Owlet, made her usual daily visit to Harcourt.

She found him much less morbid, much more cheerful than on any preceding visit.

The contact of a vigorous mind like that of Lawyer Merritt had given him tone.

They spoke hopefully to each other of his case. spent the greater part of the day with him, and only took leave in time to catch the last train to Snowden.

On reaching the little seaside town, she called at the post office for her mail.

She found but one letter. It was from Dr. Washburn, and announced that that day's steamer would bring down to her the first installment of invalid children and nurses, and that he himself should come down in charge of the party.

This pleased Miss Fronde very much, as she knew that Dr. Washburn had retired from general practice,

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and that therefore this self-imposed task would involve no loss to him.

"Then they will be here to-night," she said, with a feeling of satisfaction that her wish to be useful was about to be gratified.

She turned to her little companion and said:

"Owlet, dear, there are seven poor litttle sick children coming down from the hot city to get well in this cool place. Are you glad?"

"Oh, you just bet your best bonnet! May I help to take care of the dear little things?"

"Yes, indeed. You may do all that you can for them," said Roma.

They had been walking down the road toward the wharf, and now they reached the boat, where they found the boys, ready to row them back to the isle.

The lady and the child seated themselves in the stern of the boat, the boys laid themselves heartily to the oars, and in half an hour reached the isle.

As soon as she entered her room Roma sent Tom to summon his mother, and then rang for Wilet.

By the time she had laid off her mantle and hat, both women were in attendance.

She told them of the expected arrivals and sent them through all the rooms set apart for the children and their attendants, to see that they were well aired and quite ready for their expected inmates.

'Rusalem brought in the tea and waited on the table.

Roma hurried through the meal, and then followed her two women upstairs to oversee their work, with Owlet, as usual, at her heels.

Roma was feeling much more hopeful and happy than she had felt at any time since Will Harcourt's incarceration.

As soon as she had seen everything in perfect order for her little protégés and their nurses, she came downstairs and sat on the front porch to wait.

"Will you let me sit up, too, to see the dear little things, Lady?" inquired Owlet, drawing her small chair to Miss Fronde's side.

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Now, my reader may have observed that strong Roma was weak in one direction. She was much too indulgent to children.

And so, instead of telling this child that it was eight o'clock, and time for all little girls to be in bed, and sending her off incontinently, she temporized and said:

"But the boat will be late, my dear. It will be ten o'clock, perhaps eleven, before it gets here. Well, don't look so disappointed. You may sit up until you get so sleepy that you will want to go to bed."

Owlet flew into her Lady's lap, and kissed her.

They sat together on the porch until the last tints of the afterglow faded from the sea and sky, and Titus came up as usual at that hour to ask leave to go and help the fishermen with their seines, got permission, and passed down the cliff.

Presently Owlet's head began to droop, she laid it in her Lady's lap, and soon fell fast asleep.

Roma raised her gently, carried her upstairs, and put her to bed.

Then she came down and went into the kitchen, where 'Rusalem, Wilet, Lucy and Tom were sitting waiting for the boat, so as to be at hand, to help, if needed, to bring the children up to the house, and carry them to their rooms.

"Wouldn't you like to go down to the fishing landing, Tom?" kindly inquired Miss Fronde.

"Oh, yes, mist'ess ma'am, ef I could be spared."

"You can be spared. You will hear when the steamboat whistle blows, then you and Titus, who is at the landing, may come up to the house, in case you should be wanted."

Tom thanked his mistress, and ran away.

Roma returned to her rocking-chair on the porch.

It was a beautiful, starlight night.

"The air was still and the water still,"

or nearly so. No sound was heard but the soft lapping of the sea upon the sand, or the low chirp of the

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tiny insects who take up the hymn of nature where the birds have dropped it, and sing all night.

Roma sat alone, gazing dreamily out to sea.

Her eyes becoming accustomed to the brilliant darkness, she presently perceived over the dark, blue-black water, approaching from afar, a speck which she believed to be the coming steamer.

As she gazed, it drew nearer and grew longer, until she could see its shape and proportions, and knew it for the Washington boat.

There was something weirdly beautiful to the senses of the solitary watcher in the silent gliding of that steamer over the night sea.

But soon it was no longer a silent motion.

The sound of the engine that propelled it began to be heard, faintly at first, then distinctly, then louder and louder, until the puffing and blowing filled all the air, drowning the sound of the sea and the song of the insect.

At last the steam horn blew, and the sound of the engine ceased.

Then Roma knew that the steamer had stopped to send off a boat to land the passengers for the isle.

Presently she saw a speck that she knew to be the boat put off from the steamer's side, and glide over the dark waters toward the isle.

Tom and Titus had both heard the whistle, and both came running from the fishing landing, in obedience to orders issued two hours before.

The boat had by this time crossed halfway between the steamer and the isle, and was plainly visible.

"Come! We will walk down to the beach and receive the visitors there," said Miss Fronde, as she threw a scarf over her head, and led the way down the cliff, followed by the two boys.

As they reached the bottom of the cliff, the boat touched the sands.

It contained a load of children, two women and three men. Two of the men were boatmen. The third was the doctor.

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The boat stopped, the boatmen drew in their oars, and the doctor, a tall, venerable, white-haired old man, stepped on shore and began to hand out the women and children, while the boatmen began to throw out various baskets, boxes and bundles.

Roma stepped from the shadow of the rock that had hidden her and her two boys, came forward, and said:

"How do you do, Dr. Washburn? It was very kind of you to take charge of these babies."

"Ah, my angel woman, are you here? And are you quite well, my dear? And is it this dim light that makes you look so white?" inquired the venerable friend, scanning her with affectionate scrutiny, while the newly landed women stood, each with a baby in her arms and other small children clinging around her; and the boatmen, having thrown the last parcel on shore, took their oars, turned their boat, and began to row back to the steamer.

"I am quite well, thank you, doctor," Roma replied.

"And who are these lads?" he next inquired, as he noticed, for the first time, Tom and Titus, each of whom had tenderly taken a tiny toddler in his arms to carry up the cliff.

"Why, you ought to know them, doctor. You saw them both often enough when on your visits to the Wesleyan Flats. Titus here used to run the elevator. And he was also, probably, a patient of yours last month, in the children's hospital, where, I think, you were one of the consulting physicians."

"Why certainly. I remember Titus Blair. Bad case of typhoid fever. But we pulled him through. How do you do, my boy?"

Now Titus had his arms full of two-year-old baby, and could not take off his hat, nor even touch it, to the venerable physician, which was very embarrassing to a polite boy like he was. But he bowed low, baby and all, and said:

"Very well, thanky, sir; and hope you are very well yourself, sir."

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"Quite well, my boy, thank you. And this one?" the doctor inquired, pointing to Tom, who, being bigger and stronger than Titus, had mounted a young baby on each arm, both of whom were wailing, pawing at his cheeks, and trying to eat his ears.

"Oh," said Roma, smiling, "that is Tom, the little colored gentleman, as my Owlet called him, who was bell boy at the Wesleyan."

"Why, of course! I know Tom. How does the world use you, my boy?" kindly inquired the doctor.

"Fust yate, Marse Doctor, sah. How do it cheat yo'se'f, Marse Doctor, sah?" inquired the boy, grinning from ear to ear; for Tom had a great deal more of modest assurance than Titus had.

"Shabbily, my boy, shabbily."

"Den I knows how it is a werry wicked worl', des as de p'eacher tells me so," said Tom, twitching his chin out of a little cannibal's mouth, and causing it to yell.

Meanwhile the two women stood waiting, each with a baby in her arms and a small child clinging to her skirts, and crying to be taken up.

"This is one of the occasions on which I thank Heaven for unusual bodily strength," said Roma, with a smile, as she stooped and lifted both wailing children, one on her right arm and one on her left. She laid the little faces against her cheeks, and spoke to them tenderly, and they stopped crying.

"No, no; that will never do. For Heaven's sake, let me relieve you of half of the burden," said Dr. Washburn, attempting to take from Roma one child, who only clung closer to her neck, and screamed and kicked vigorously at him for his pains.

"And yet there are those who deny the doctrine of original sin and total depravity," he said, with a sigh, as he desisted from his endeavor.

But Lucy and Wilet now appeared upon the scene, and relieved Miss Fronde of her double load.

"Now shall I show you the way to the house?" inquired Miss Fronde.

"Yes, my dear, if you please. These young mothers

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must be rather weary. By the way, I have not yet named them to you. Will you step this way?"

The women to whom the doctor put the question came up.

"Mrs. Adams, Mrs. Barton—Miss Fronde," he said, presenting them. "Both widows, my dear. Now we will go up to the house."

The two widows looked longingly on their "traps" lying on the sands.

"Do not be anxious about your baggage. It will be quite safe where it lies until I can send the boys back for it," said Miss Fronde.

They were reassured, and turned to climb the cliff.

Miss Fronde and Dr. Washburn led the way, followed by the whole procession.

"Ah! this is delicious!—delicious!—the very breath of life, Miss Fronde. I think I shall prescribe the seaside for myself, and stay down here to look after your sanitarium until the young professional poisoner whom I have in my eye is ready for duty," said the old physician.

"Oh, I wish you would, Dr. Washburn. I should be so glad and grateful if you would. But have you really found a competent house physician for our little sanitarium?"

"Well, yes, my dear, I think so. Louis Law, a talented young fellow, who expects to take his M. D. degree at the commencement of the Washington Medical College this June."

"Doctor, do you think he is competent enough?"

"Decidedly," replied the old physician.

By this time the house was reached.

Lights were burning in the hall and in the upper chambers.

Jerusalem was on duty.

Miss Fronde asked the doctor to go with her, called the others to follow her, and led the way up two flights of stairs to the two large, connected rooms that had been assigned as the dormitory of this set of children.

Tom and Titus, as soon as they were relieved of

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their little charges, were dispatched to the beach to bring up the baggage.

Lucy and Wilet, after having laid their burdens on the outside of a cot, were sent down to the kitchen to fetch up the warm milk and bread for the children's refreshment.

Some of the little waifs were heavy with sleep, others howling from hunger.

"Poor little souls!" said Miss Fronde, as she sat with one of the tiniest baby boys on her lap. "It is a pity that their arrival should be in the night."

"Couldn't be helped, you know, my dear child, if they were to come by steamer from Washington to the Isle of Storms, which was the best way by which they could come. Oh, the voyage did them good. And this won't hurt them. Children always cry when they are hungry and sleepy. And here come their relief," said the old doctor, cheerfully.

Tom and Titus entered with the baggage, followed by Lucy and Wilet, with the warm milk and bread.

Little nightgowns were unpacked and put on the children, and then the warm milk and bread was given to them, and when they had eaten and were filled, they were put to bed, and all became serene.

Wilet had brought up a pot of hot chocolate and some buttered toast for the two women, which they received gratefully.

It was now eleven o'clock, and Roma said:

"There is a collation spread for you in the dining room. Will you come down and partake?"

"No, my dear; but I will go to bed, if you will allow me."

"Certainly. Tom, show Dr. Washburn to the front room on the other side of the hall, and take his orders."

"Good-night, my dear. Good-night, all. Come, boy." And the doctor retired, followed by Tom.

Roma looked around on her charges.

The two women had finished their repast, and Lucy and Wilet were gathering up the crockery ware to carry down into the kitchen.

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Roma noticed for the first time the pale and pinched look of all the little pillowed faces, and thanked God that she was able to give them the healthy food and fresh air and careful tending that they needed.

Then she looked more attentively on the two women that were to have charge of them—widowed mothers of two of the little ones and nurses for the other five. The elder woman seemed about thirty years of age, was tall, gaunt, sallow-faced, hollow-eyed, black-haired. Now that she had laid off her rusty black shawl and shabby black bonnet, she appeared in a faded black calico gown, without relief of cuffs or collars, and whose only merit was its cleanliness.

The expression of her countenance was not only sad, it was tragic. The sallow face, the sunken cheeks, the large, black, staring eyes, full of a sort of amazed despair, frightful to meet, suggested much of sorrow, but more of madness.

Her voice was deep and hoarse, and its tones would haunt the hearer long after its sounds had ceased.

Her companion was a contrast to herself. She was tall, thin and fair. with light hair and blue eyes, and a wan face, of which the large, round, prominent forehead—greatly developed in the region where phrenologists have placed the organ of mirthfulness—seemed to form more than one half, and in the hollow cheeks of which the bright flush of hectic fever burned. She was clothed in a faded calico gown of many colors, that had once been bright, and she wore a clean but ragged lace fichu around her neck.

She really was mirthful, in season and out of season. She was mirthful to the extent of silliness, and had been giggling ever since her arrival.

Roma bade the women good-night, advised them to go to bed, and left the dormitory.

She retired to her own room, where she found her little bedfellow sleeping soundly.

Roma herself slept that night for the first time since she had heard of Harcourt's imprisonment.

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It was rather late in the morning when she awoke, and she missed Owlet from her side.

This did not surprise her, as the child often stole out of bed, dressed and went down to look at the sea before she herself was awake.

She arose and took her bath, and was sitting in her dressing gown, combing her long, bright hair, when Owlet came in.

"Where have you been, my dear? Down by the sea?"

"No; I have been to see the babies. I have been staying with the babies ever since I got up. Lady, have I any fluency with you?" solemnly demanded Owlet.

"What do you mean, my dear?" inquired Miss Fronde.

"People who have fluencies with people to give people offices and things."

"How do you know, my dear?"

"Oh, I know. I have heard people talk about fluencies and offices in Washington. That's the most of the business in Washington, I reckon. Now, have I any fluency with you?"

"An immense deal," said Miss Fronde, smiling at the young lobbyist. "Do you want an office?"

"Not for myself, just yet. No one can tell for the future."

"For anyone else, then?"

"Yes, Lady, I do," solemnly replied Owlet.

"Who is it, then, my dear?"

"You know Mrs. Annie? I have told you about her. And Mr. William can tell you more about her than I can. Well, I want you to send for Mrs. Annie to come and look after the babies, and learn them two ladies upstairs how to be possessed of common sense."

"What do you mean, Catherine? What have the poor women done?"

"Oh, don't talk. The long, lank, dark one is looking black enough, and sighing deep enough to break every baby's heart! Every one of the babies, except

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her own who is used to her, bursts out crying every time she looks at it."

"That is certainly very bad, very bad! But perhaps the poor woman has had trouble."

"Well, I am sorry if she has; but so have I had trouble! Oh, haven't I had trouble, though! Heaps and heaps and heaps of trouble for years and years and years! But now I am happy with you, Lady. I don't go about looking like the Witch-o'-Windy, and making everybody miserable! And I think that dark lady might cheer up, now she's so comfortable. And as for that other lady—oh, Lord!"

"What has she done?"

"She? Oh, don't talk! She's giggling from morning till night! She 'fuses the babies."

"But it is only morning yet."

"Well, she'll giggle till night. You'll see! And she'll begin again to-morrow morning. I wonder the babies ain't ashamed of bringing them ladies down here."

"But they brought the babies!"

"Then I wonder the babies ain't ashamed of being brought! But then, they don't know nothing, poor, little, innocent things. No, they don't, or they would be ashamed of coming with such a pall as the dark one is, and such a jew's-harp as the other is! In all the long years I lived in the vale of tears, I never did see the like of them! You will send for Mrs. Annie, Lady, and you will ask Mr. William about her? Will you, now, Lady?"

"Yes, dear, I will talk with Mr. Harcourt to-day."

Roma had completed her toilet, and now she left the room, followed by Owlet.

They parted in the passage. Owlet rushed upstairs to see the babies, and Roma went downstairs to take an airing.

The front door stood wide open, and she went out to look upon the beauty and the glory of the sunlit land and sea.

But the first object that met her sight was Lawyer

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Merritt, sitting in the Quaker armchair, with an open Bible on his knees, for this was Sunday morning.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE TRIAL

On hearing Roma's footsteps on the porch, Mr. Merritt turned, closed his book, and rose to meet her.

"Oh, I am so glad to see you back so soon. When did you arrive?" inquired Roma, holding out both hands to greet her friend.

"Reached Snowden by the night train at daybreak, hired the first boat I could find, and came across immediately. Got here at sunrise. Good omen."

"And you didn't have me called!" exclaimed Roma, reproachfully.

"There was no one to call you. When I stepped upon the porch, the whole household seemed buried in profound repose. Tigress showed a disposition to breakfast on me, but either thought an old lawyer too tough diet, or recognized in me a friend of the family. At any rate, after a furious dash forward, she suddenly pulled up and retreated."

"Oh, I am sorry," said Roma.

"Why, no harm was done. I sat down here on this porch, lighted my pipe, and watched the daily miracle, the triumph of the sun—the most splendid and magnificent spectacle in nature! Eh, Roma?"

Roma was speechless. She never attempted to express "unutterable thoughts."

On the lawn, under the shade of the spreading branches of the great walnut tree, 'Rusalem was setting the table for breakfast.

"You see that our morning meal will soon be ready," she said. "Would you like to go to your room first?"

"No, my dear. I availed myself of the washroom

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on the train before I left it. I will sit here, if you will permit me."

Roma drew a chair to his side and sat down, and then the lawyer resumed his own seat.

"Well, now will you tell me what success you have had?"

"Good success. I have retained the ablest jurist and barrister in the State, if not in the whole country —Hiram Keneage. At his suggestion, I have also retained John Kent and Reuben T. Worthington as associate counsel. Keneage thinks favorably of Harcourt's case. They will meet me at Ceciltown to see their client to-morrow."

"And the grand jury will meet to-morrow, you said?"

"And there are so few presentations that I think Harcourt's case will be disposed of."

"You think they will indict him?"

"Undoubtedly. But that is only the beginning, you know."

Roma sighed.

The lawyer continued:

"The court will meet on the first Monday in next month, and as there are so few cases before the grand jury, and none left over from the last term, the docket will be a short one, and Harcourt will probably be arraigned during the first week of the session."

"I hope so. The sooner the affair is over, the better. Suspense is the worst trouble we have to bear just now."

Then they talked of other matters.

Roma told him of the arrival of Dr. Washburn, and the first installment of little patients.

"The doctor, I think, does not know of Harcourt's imprisonment, or if he does, he is unaware of my own deep interest in the matter. Not a word has been exchanged between us on the subject. Although, to be sure, I only saw him last night, when he came in charge of the children and nurses, and our talk was only of them," she explained.

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As she spoke the doctor came out upon the porch.

"Ah! this is a pleasant surprise, old friend!" he said, offering his hand to the lawyer, who rose to meet him.

"Is it?" inquired the latter, dryly. "Didn't you know that Miss Fronde keeps a sanitarium for old gentlemen as well as young babies?"

"Her very presence creates a sanitarium, even in a fever ward," said the doctor, gallantly.

The breakfast bell rang, very opportunely, and the aged Chesterfield gave his hostess his arm to lead her to the breakfast table under the tree.

There were seven plates laid, seven chairs set. But there were only three persons present, until Titus came walking up the cliff from the fishing landing, and Owlet came out of the house from the babies' dormitory.

"Where are the two women, Catherine? Why do they not come down to breakfast?"

"I told you them two ladies were not possessed of common sense, and no more they are not, and they never will be. The jew's-harp laughed, and said she was 'shamed to come down before the quality. And the Raven croaked and said nothing, but she meant it, all the same. And Aunt Wilet said they knew their places better than young mist'ess, and she would bring their breakfast up from the kitchen, and then I was so disgusted I came away," concluded Owlet, as she took her place at the table.

"Roma, my dear, you are the most consistently Christian and democratic of all the professors of such principles I ever met in all my life," said the doctor, as he received a cup of coffee from the hostess' hand.

"Why?" she inquired.

"Who but you would ask two women of that class to sit down to table with her?"

"Do you object to their presence?" dryly inquired the lady.

"Not in the least. How should I venture to object? Yet I am glad they had the good sense to decline the

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honor. You see I differ from you, Miss Catherine," he added, on observing the child's look of deep disapprobation.

"I know you do," she said, with a sigh; "a great many people do. And it is all because they are not possessed—— But what's the use of talking?" she inquired, with a discouraged air, as she turned from the doctor, and addressed herself to her bread and milk.

"Who will go to church with me this morning?" inquired Roma.

Both gentlemen expressed more than willingness to attend her.

So when the "al fresco" repast was over they all re-entered the house to get ready for the duty.

"Please tell Dr. Washburn all about our trouble," said Roma, as she passed Merritt on her way up the stairs.

She passed all the way up to the third story, and looked in for a moment on the children and their nurses.

Already the effect of the fine sea air and the pure milk was seen on their improved appearances; five of them were rolling and laughing on a large square of carpet laid in the middle of the floor; two, being the younger, were sleeping peacefully in their cots.

"The doctor says you may take the children down on the lawn; but you must take the rug to lay on the grass," said Roma, as she looked in.

"Why, they're getting so peert now we can't hardly do nothing with 'em. Look at that 'ere boy of mine, kicking up his heels and crowing! One wouldn't a thought this time yistidy he was lying flat on his back, gasping for breath. No, that they wouldn't," said Sarah. She was Mrs. Barton, but no one ever called her anything but Sarah.

"Be sure you take that square of carpet and lay it on the grass for them to roll on, lest they should get cold."

"We'll do it; we don't want to be kept 'wake all night with them screaming," said Sarah.

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Miss Fronde went down to her own room, and was soon ready for church.

She met 'Rusalem in the hall below.

"I shall return in time for an early dinner, so that you and your wife and Lucy and Tom can go to Snowden to afternoon service," she said.

"Thanky, youn' mist'ess," he answered. "But w'at's de use ob dat w'en dere aine no s'loons open on Sund'y, an' a po', ole pilg'im couldn' git a drop ob anyfing to jink ef he was perishin' fo' it. All dese yere people is a dreat deal too yighteous obermuch, dey is," he muttered to himself.

Roma went out on the porch, where she found the two gentlemen and little Owlet waiting for her.

They all went down the cliff by the winding path together, and reached the sands, where they found Tom and Titus seated in the boat.

"Have you got the padlock with you, boys?" she inquired.

"Padlock? No, mum!" answered Titus, in surprise.

"Ah! how should you know anything about it? But there is a padlock hanging up in the boathouse; Tom, you run and get it, and be quick about it. We must not leave you sitting in the boat all this Sabbath morning; but lock the boat to the staple in the post and take you on to church."

Tom was off like a shot, and soon returned with the padlock in his hands.

The church party were by this time seated, and the boys got in, took up the oars and shoved off.

They had a pleasant trip across the bay, and landed at Snowden in good time to walk to the little Episcopal Church of St. Mary, on the hill.

After the services were over, Roma said:

"We may be away for several hours, my boys; you need not return immediately to the boat, but take a walk in the woods, if you like, and later—at five o'clock, let us say—come to the boat to meet us."

Both lads thanked the lady—Titus with his best bow, Tom by plucking his hair hard enough to scalp himself—and made off.

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"Dr. Washburn, you have heard of our trouble. We are going now to Ceciltown to see Mr. Harcourt. Will you go with us? Or would you rather stay here and meet us at the boat on our return?" Roma inquired.

"I will go with you, my dear; but, as I am a stranger to Mr. Harcourt, I will wait in the lobby, or somewhere else outside, until you have made your call. I think there is nothing more cruelly thoughtless than for a stranger to intrude on a man in his unhappy circumstances."

"I thank you for your consideration, Dr. Washburn," Roma said. And they walked on toward the depot.

They caught the express train, and had a rapid run into Ceciltown.

They walked on to the prison.

When they arrived, they left Dr. Washburn in the sheriff's room, with Owlet to keep him company, the child saying at parting:

"Be sure you don't forget to ask Mr. William about Mrs. Annie's character. Of course I could not ask you to take her without a character."

"I will not forget," said Miss Fronde, as she joined the lawyer outside the door, and both walked down toward Harcourt's cell.

They found the young man sitting in the easy-chair Roma had sent him, and engaged in reading a volume of Canon Farrar's discourses.

He rose immediately and greeted his visitors with a smile—the first smile that Roma had seen on his face for nine months.

He placed her in the easy-chair he had just vacated, and he and his other visitor seated themselves at the side of the bed.

Then Mr. Merritt told him of his success in retaining counsel, and they discussed his case anew in all its bearings.

A strange peace had settled on young Harcourt's mind immediately after he had given himself up, and to that peace was now added an even stranger cheerfulness.

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When they had exhausted the subject for the time being, and the two men had dropped into silence, Roma remembered little Owlet's commission, and mentioned the child's desire that Mrs. Annie should be engaged as a nurse in the children's sanitarium.

"Annie Moss?" said Harcourt. "No better woman lives in this world than dear Annie. No one more completely fitted at all points for the position you mention than Annie. Thirty years old, strong, healthy, cheerful, with a pleasant, rosy face, a gentle manner, and a musical voice, she would be a very angel in a child's hospital. Above all, Annie is a sincere Christian," said Harcourt.

"Would she take the place of matron in the sanitarium at a good salary?"

"I have no doubt she would be very glad to take it. She would love the work, aside from the financial compensation. And she has absolutely no ties to bind her to her garret in New York. Only I would not offer the place to her unless it was to be a permanent one. It would be a pity that she should break up her humble home for a season's engagement; for she would do that, if she thought she could do good."

"The situation will be a permanent one. And if the woman will come to me, and I find her all that you believe her to be—as no doubt I shall—I will make her the matron of the sanitarium at the same salary I shall pay the house physician. Having such a woman as that in charge will leave me free to go where other duties may call me. And, by the way, other duties call me away from you now, dear Will. I have to get back to the isle in time to let my colored folk all go to evening service," said Roma, quickly rising.

"Shall I see you to-morrow?" he inquired, in a pleading tone.

The old lawyer answered for the lady:

"No, Mr. Harcourt, you cannot see her to-morrow. Your counsel will gather here in consultation with you, and the lady's presence would not be expedient."

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Harcourt turned and looked appealingly toward Roma.

"I will write to you to-morrow by Mr. Merritt, and will write to you every day until I see you. And I will see you as soon as I can," she said.

"That should satisfy you, my young friend," added the lawyer.

And then they took leave and left the cell.

They rejoined Dr. Washburn and Owlet in the sheriff's room. The doctor's gray eyes were twinkling with humor. The child was looking grave.

"Well," exclaimed the former, "since I was a schoolboy, I have never had such an admonition as I have to-day received from this old lady."

"I was only talking to him for his own good, for I know he means well," said Owlet, deprecatingly.

"What was the matter?" inquired Mr. Merritt.

"Well, my failure in Christian duty in not going in to see Mr. William, who was 'sick and in prison,' according to the Scriptures. And I just out of church, too. And what was the use of people going to church at all if they didn't keep the commandments? Oh, she sang me a song, I tell you."

"You are mistaken," said literal Owlet. "I never sing songs on Sunday. But I'd sing a hymn for you:

"'Hark, from the tombs a doleful sound!'"

"Oh, pray, don't. I don't like that hymn," said the doctor, raising both hands up in mild horror. "Sing—anything but that."

"Then I'll sing any hymn you choose, if you will only mend your ways and try to be a better man."

"I will try," said the old doctor, lifting his broad-brimmed, white hat in mock humility.

"That child has no more idea of veneration for dignities than a puppy or a kitten," said Lawyer Merritt.

They were standing at the great door, waiting for a keeper to come and open it for them.

Estep soon made his appearance, and, with the

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usual grating of locks and bolts, and heavy falling of chains and bars, let them out.

They left the prison, and walked leisurely down to the railway station, where they had to wait half an hour for a train.

It was five o'clock when they reached Snowden, and half-past five when they got to the wharf, where they found the boys seated in the boat waiting for them.

"Good lads," said Roma, as she and her party entered and took their seats.

Titus blushed with pleasure at this praise. So, perhaps, did Tom, only his complexion did not reveal the fact.

They sped away across the bay, and half an hour later reached the isle.

It was six o'clock. Roma, with Owlet at her heels, went at once to the children's dormitory, where she found the babies all getting their supper of warm milk and bread, and all still improving.

The Sunday evening passed quietly and pleasantly to the people in the house.

The four colored servants went to Snowden for the evening service.

The nurses put the babies to bed, and soon followed them.

Owlet went to rest at her usual hour.

Roma, the two old gentlemen and the boy, Titus, sat on the front piazza, enjoying the dark splendor of the starlit sky and sea.

But as all, except robust Roma, were fatigued with the day's doings, the party broke up early and retired to rest.

Early the next morning Lawyer Merritt started for Snowden to meet the counsel he had retained for Harcourt, and conduct them to their client. He told Roma that he should not return until late in the evening, as he wished to know certainly the decision of the grand jury on Harcourt's case, although he had not the slightest doubt what that decision would be.

After the lawyer had left her, Roma went upstairs to the babies' dormitory, and had them all brought

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down to the lawn to benefit by the fresh air and clear sunlight.

Then she had her first talk with the doctor about the maladies of her little protégés.

She had had no opportunity of speaking on the subject before.

She learned that their ages ranged from ten months to three years. Those under two years old were suffering from dentition, the others from malaria; and all had suffered from foul air, unwholesome food and unclean clothing. These evils, the doctor said, could be at once remedied in her sanitarium.

Then Roma inquired about the two nurses, and learned that both were widows, and mothers of the two youngest children.

"The dark one," inquired Roma; "what has been the trouble that has stamped itself so awfully on her features?"

"Ah! poor wretch! One year ago she was a beautiful, vain, frivolous woman. No worse than that; yet vanity wrecked the life of Agnes Adams. Six months ago her husband was hanged for the murder of a fellow workman in a furious fit of jealousy. No wonder the woman's face is scathed with incurable remorse and despair. But it is a great pity for the poor baby to have to meet that look every time he raises his eyes to his mother's face," concluded the doctor.

"We must be very kind to her, and try to lead her to the only true source of consolation," Roma said.

"Yes, if that be possible; but she is very hard."

"And the other woman?" inquired Roma.

"Ah! poor little wretch! she, too, has a history; and sorrowful enough it is, too, though it has not broken her heart. She is the innocent victim of a bigamist; but you had best hear her story from her own lips. She is not at all reticent," replied the doctor, and he lighted his cigar, said "Excuse me," and walked down to the lawn to smoke.

Later in the day Roma did hear the story of Sarah

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Barton from her own lips. She seemed to consider the wrong in the light of a joke.

"Wasn't it funny?" she asked, in telling Miss Fronde. "Just think of it! There he got the license all reg'lar out'n the clerk's office in the City Hall, Washington City, and we were married by Father Acker, in Trinity Catholic Church, Georgetown, and we went home to live 'long o' the ole woman——"

"What old woman?" inquired Miss Fronde.

"Mother, in course. And he got work at Donnohue's soap factory, and we was as happy as the day was long, even so be ef he were twenty year older than me; for you see he was mighty good to me and mother—I can say that for him. And mother! why, she thought the sun and moon rose and set with him —that she did! And we flourished like green gages for more'n a year, when one evening, when we was all taking tea together, in walks his first wife, with her three children, and catches him with that there baby on his knees, and him about three months old then. Oh! wasn't it funny! You never saw anything so funny in all your life as that man's face was when he seed her. You never seen a man so scared. Well, she walked him off out'n that house right before her face, and the three children trailin' after her. I never laughed so much since the old black cat had her kittens in my bandbox and ruined my new Sunday bonnet. To think all the year he had been married to me, living 'long o' me and the ole 'oman and the baby, he had another wife and nine children at Drover's Rest, up in Cooney! The way some men do carry on is too funny for any use in this world!"

"And what did you do then?" inquired Miss Fronde.

"Nothing. Why, honey, what could I do? Father Acker—dear man, he was a saint—what married us, come to see me to comfort me; and he says, says he:

"'My dear child, you cannot be happy, but you can be good.' And I ups and says:

"'Hi, Father Acker! why can't I be happy! Haven't I got my baby?' And, thank the Lord, nobody but

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Him can take it away from me—and they can't nuther!" she added, with a chuckling little laugh.

"You are a philosopher, Mrs. Barton," said Miss Fronde.

"Don't know about that. But I'm not going to fret my flesh to fiddle strings about nothing. 'Twan't my fault, and why should I feel bad about it?"

"Why should you, indeed?" said Roma, as she smiled on Sarah Barton and left her.

The day seemed very long to Miss Fronde. Intense anxiety for the return of Lawyer Merritt and news of Will Harcourt's case absorbed her thoughts.

She could settle herself to no occupation.

The seven babies were playing on the lawn before the house.

The two nurses, with some light needlework in their hands, were watching them.

Owlet and Titus were seated at one end of the piazza, busy over their long-neglected studies.

Dr. Washburn was reclining in a Quaker rocking-chair, reading the Baltimore "American" that Lawyer Merritt had brought down with him on the day previous, and it seemed all of a piece with the dreamy restfulness of the place that the old gentleman should be sitting there half asleep over the day before yesterday's journal.

But Roma could not enter into the rest of the place.

She walked up and down the piazza until the doctor, observing her perturbed condition, folded his paper, put it in his pocket, rose and said:

"Will you show me the way to the fishing landing, Roma? I should like to take a look at the fishermen at their work."

"Certainly," she said, as she caught up her hat from its peg on the porch and joined him.

They walked down the cliff together and along the beach until they came to the stretch of hard ground where were staked the land edge of the seines, which the men in boats had drawn out to sea to entrap the herring.

Dr. Washburn made acquaintance with the fisher-

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men and asked them many questions concerning their craft, which they answered promptly.

He waited until they began to haul the seine, saw the "great draught of fishes," congratulated the fishermen on their success, and then proposed to Miss Fronde to return to the house.

They went up the cliff together.

The doctor lighted his cigar and strolled on the lawn.

Roma went upon the piazza, seated herself, called her two pupils before her, heard their lessons, corrected their sums, and then sent them out to take exercise on the lawn.

Ah! how long the time seemed! The luncheon hour came at length, and Roma rejoiced that one-half of the weary day was done.

After luncheon, to kill the time as well as to benefit the children, Miss Fronde sent for four of the perambulators she had purchased and had them brought up from the barn and the babies placed in them.

The two nurses and the two boys propelled them down by a safe but circuitous path to the beach, where they had a smooth drive.

Roma, with Owlet on her hand, followed to "keep an eye on" them to guard against accidents.

They spent two hours on the beach, and then returned by the same roundabout route.

It was time now to give the little ones their suppers and put them to bed.

The nurses, assisted by Roma, Tom and Titus, took them up to their dormitory, where they were finally left in the care of the two mothers.

Roma returned to the piazza to sit down and wait for Mr. Merritt.

Dr. Washburn was still walking and smoking on the lawn in front of the house.

Mr. Merritt reached the isle at sunset.

Roma, from her standpoint on the front piazza, saw the boat approaching. She threw a scarf around her head, and went down to the beach to meet him there.

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"What news?" she eagerly demanded, as the boat touched the sands.

"Just what I warned you to expect, my dear," said the lawyer, as he stepped on shore, while the hired boatman who had brought him to the isle put about and rowed rapidly away in the direction of Snowden.

"The grand jury have indicted Will Harcourt?" exclaimed Roma.

"Yes," said the lawyer.

"For——"

"Willful murder."

Roma clasped her hands, dropped her face upon them and moaned.

"With the evidence before them, they could not do otherwise, my dear Roma. But this is not final, you know. It is only the beginning. Not half the accused who are indicted are ever convicted!" said the lawyer, in a soothing tone.

"How did Mr. Harcourt take it?" inquired Roma.

"Very quietly."

"How do the counsel now look upon his case, since they have seen the indictment?"

"Very hopefully."

"And how soon do you think his trial will come on?"

"As I told you, the court meets on Monday next, a week from to-day. There are but few cases on the docket besides his own, and these are unimportant. I think that they may all be disposed of in two or three days. And Harcourt's case may be called on Wednesday or Thursday of next week."

"Can I see Mr. Harcourt to-morrow?" anxiously inquired Roma.

"I would not attempt to do so, if I were in your place, Roma. I would not, if I were you, go to see him either to-morrow or the next day, or any day before the court meets. He will be closely occupied with his counsel all the time."

"Then certainly I will not disturb him. I only wished not to seem to neglect him."

While they talked they had been climbing the cliff,

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and by this time they had reached the house, where they found Dr. Washburn reclining in a Quaker arm-chair and Owlet seated on a hassock by his side, with her head and his knee, and his fingers wandering idly through her bright brown hair. They seemed to be the very best of friends.

"Well, Miss Catherine!" gayly exclaimed the lawyer, after he had greeted the doctor.

"Does your venerable pupil behave himself any better? Has he mended his ways?"

She looked up, took the doctor's hand and lifted it to her lips with an air of exquisite grace and sweetness, as she replied:

"I have great 'spect and love for him."

Mr. Merritt smiled on the child, as he crossed the porch, entered the house and went upstairs to dress for dinner.

That evening passed very quietly and pleasantly.

The next morning Lawyer Merritt went to Cecil-town alone. He was rowed across the bay to Snowden by Tom and Titus, who, after landing him, brought the boat immediately back to the isle—Mr. Merritt declaring that he would much rather hire a boat to bring him back in the evening than keep the two boys waiting in idleness all day long for him. He was the bearer of a long letter from Roma to Harcourt, full of sympathy and encouragement for the prisoner.

Roma wrote another letter that morning. It was to Annie Moss, thanking her for all her care of and kindness to Owlet, and offering her the position of head matron at the sanitarium at a liberal salary, and her traveling expenses to be paid by Miss Fronde, in the event of her acceptance of the place.

The day passed very slowly with Roma, and much as the preceding one had.

But evening came at length, and with it Mr. Merritt, who brought a note from Harcourt to Roma Fronde, thanking and blessing her for the strength and comfort she gave him.

From this time, every day while Roma abstained

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from visiting the prisoner, she sent a note by Mr. Merritt in the morning and received an answer in the evening.

But Harcourt's trial did not come on quite so early as they had expected.

Not until Saturday evening did Mr. Merritt bring any certain news of the time of its commencement. That evening he was later than usual. Roma had watched on the porch for the approach of the boat from Snowden until it was too late to see anything, and then she had withdrawn into the parlor.

The lamps were lighted when Lawyer Merritt came suddenly into the room, threw his hat on a table, dropped into a chair, and said:

"Well, my dear, Harcourt will be arraigned on Monday! He and his counsel are quite ready to go to trial. Although he will be charged with willful murder, based upon his own deposition before the magistrate, yet he will plead not guilty."

"He was not guilty," said Roma, sinking back in her chair, somewhat overcome by the news, for she was not the strong Roma of former days. Sorrow, anxiety, suspense were beginning to do their work even on her fine physique.

"Cheer up, my dear. Harcourt himself is the sole witness for the prosecution, and they must take his version of the shooting or none. And while he is the only witness for the State, there are hosts of witnesses for the accused."

"I do not understand," said Roma, faintly. "'Hosts of witnesses for the accused!' How can that be? Who can contradict his own confession under oath?"

"My dear Roma, there are witnesses who, without perjuring themselves, will swear away the character of the deceased gambler to that degree as to convince the jury that his slayer—if he had a slayer—was a public benefactor who deserved the thanks of legislators. Bad law! And the State's attorney will get that evidence ruled out; but it will impress the jury all the same. And then there are other witnesses who will so solemnly stake their souls on the

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perfection of Harcourt's character as to demonstratte to the most stupid and incredulous the absolute impossibility of his ever committing such a crime as that with which he stands charged."

"But there is his own confession!"

"There are other witnesses who will swear, in perfect good faith, that he was insane when making that confession. They will give many instances of eccentricity in his past that will support their theory, and go far to convince the jury that the crime he confessed was but the coinage of his own brain. The evidence before the coroner's jury that sat upon the case at the time of Yelverton's death will be reproduced to prove that the death of the gambler was a suicide. And finally his counsel will bring in evidence from the law books of many authentic instances of innocent persons accusing themselves of crimes that they never did and never could have committed."

"Mr. Harcourt will scarcely consent to that line of defense," said Roma, in strong disapprobation.

"His consent will not be asked, my dear. What? Are we going to ask a monomaniac to admit his mania?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean this, that there is a strong doubt, not only in the minds of Harcourt's counsel, but in mine also, as to whether he ever entered Yelverton's room that night. As to whether his statement of what occurred in that room on that occasion is not altogether the hallucination of an overwrought brain. That is the line of defense his counsel will take. He will have nothing to do with it. He will not be consulted on that. His counsel will arrange all that."

"I am sure that he was never insane. The defense will proceed upon false principles," said Roma, gravely.

"Then fortunately for Harcourt you have nothing to do with the arranging it any more than he has," replied Mr. Merritt.

"To-morrow is Sunday, and he will be disengaged on that day, will he not?" inquired Roma.

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"Yes, certainly," replied Mr. Merritt.

"Then I will go to Snowden to church in the morning, and to Ceciltown to see Harcourt in the afternoon," Roma concluded.

The sound of the dinner bell broke up the "tete-a-tete."

Early the next morning the boat was made ready for the trip across the bay.

Immediately after breakfast Roma, the two gentlemen, Owlet and Titus walked down the cliff to the boat and got into it.

'Rusalem and Tom were on this occasion the oarsmen.

They reached Snowden in good time for church.

'Rusalem and Tom were told to secure the boat and go to the Methodist meeting-house, to which the elder negro belonged.

Roma, her two friends and her two protégés walked on to St. Mary's.

After the service was over they walked to the station and took the train for Ceciltown, where they arrived about two o'clock.

They went directly to the prison, where they were admitted at once.

Dr. Washburn, Owlet and Titus waited in the sheriff's room while Roma and Mr. Merritt went to see Harcourt in his cell.

They found him reclining in the easy-chair Roma had sent him, and engaged in reading a volume of George McDonald's essays.

He seemed calm and cheerful, and his face lighted up at the unexpected appearance of Miss Fronde.

He vacated the easy-chair for her, while he and the lawyer seated themselves on the side of his bed. He thanked Roma for all the comforting and invigorating letters that had cheered and sustained him during the past week of her absence. And yet more warmly he thanked her for this "angel's visit," as he called her presence.

They all three talked hopefully of his case, though

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no allusion was made to the special line of defense that was to be taken.

In the course of this conversation, Harcourt drew from his breast pocket an envelope, saying that he had, on the previous day, received a letter from his friend, Silas Wynthrop, of Lone Lodge, inclosing a check for five hundred dollars in payment for some silver plate that gentleman had bought of him.

He passed the check to Mr. Merritt, with the request that he would cash it, and devote the funds, so far as they would go, to the expenses of his trial.

Mr. Merritt took the paper, and promised to do as requested.

Then Roma remembered to speak of Annie Moss, in whom Harcourt had been so much interested.

She told him that she had written to Annie, offering her the position of head matron at the sanitarium, at a good salary, and proposing, in the event of her accepting the situation, to send funds to pay her traveling expenses from New York to Snowden.

Harcourt smiled with pleasure.

"Annie is sure to accept the post," he said. "She is devoted to children and to good works. The isle will be a heaven to her."

"If she comes, I suppose she will be here in a few days. And I will bring her out to see you," said Roma, rising, for it was high time to take leave.

"Do," said Harcourt. "I should be very much pleased to see dear Annie."

They then bade him good-by, and left the cell.

The party in the sheriff's room came out to meet them in the corridor.

They left the prison, hurried to the station, and just caught their train by a minute.

A swift run soon brought them into Snowden.

On their way to the boat, they called at the post office, which was open for one hour only in the evening.

There was but one letter for Miss Fronde, and that was from Annie Moss.

Roma opened it.

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She was surprised at the fair handwriting, and faultless style of the letter.

In it Annie acknowledged the receipt of the lady's letter; expressed much pleasure in hearing that "Miss Catherine" was well; thanked Miss Fronde for the confidence shown in her by the offer of such a position as head matron of her sanitarium; accepted the offer; thanked her again for proposing to send a check to pay her traveling expenses; but explained that the sale of her own little household effects, which she should no longer need, would bring enough money to more than cover all costs of the journey.

And finally, with much love to Miss Catherine and Mr. William, if she should see him, and with renewed thanks to Miss Fronde, Annie was, "Respectfully and sincerely" hers.

And then followed the inevitable postscript, which even the best writers do not always avoid. It was but a line.

Annie would reach Snowden on Monday evening.

Roma read the letter standing in the post office, and then communicated its contents to the party.

Owlet was wild with delight and began to tell her companions all about Mrs. Annie and her nice room, with the little cooking stove and the sewing machine and the white bed. She talked as they walked all the way down to the wharf, where they found 'Rusalem and Tom seated in the boat.

And then, when she and her friends had taken their seats in it, she began anew, and talked of nothing else but Mrs. Annie, while the two negroes rowed the boat across the bay and landed them on the Isle of Storms.

The house was lighted up as they approached it, and dinner had been waiting some time.

As it was late, and they were all fatigued, they soon after dinner retired to rest.

Roma could not sleep.

At sunrise the next morning Roma Fronde rose from a restless bed and began to prepare for a long day to be spent in the courtroom at Cecilton.

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"I shall not be able to take you, my dear," she said to Owlet, who was puddling in her own little bath tub.

The child looked up with a disappointed expression.

"You will not mind if you have the babies to play with all day, will you?"

"I—will try—to bear it like a man," said the child, with a profound sigh.

Roma smiled, stooped and kissed her, and said:

"I shall send Titus back with the boat. And I shall probably bring 'Mistress Annie' with me when I return."

"Oh! oh! oh! will you, though? Oh, Lady! I know you will like Mrs. Annie ever so much! She will be like a mother to you!"

"Will she, dear?"

"She will that! She's just like a mother to Mr. William! Oh, I tell you, Mrs. Annie is 'some pumpkins'."

Roma's dislike to chide prevented her from ever rebuking the child for her use of slang as well as for her other eccentricities. She thought example was better than precept, and that Owlet, never hearing such phrases from others, would, in time, discontinue and forget them.

The two dressed and went up to the babies' dormitory, where the nurses were getting the children up and giving them warm salt-water baths. Lucy and Wilet had just brought up their fresh milk and bread.

"Ever see anything like it in your life? Only been here two days, and they are like new creeturs!" chirped Sarah Barton, who had a fine child over her knee, rubbing him down with a soft towel.

"I am very glad to see their improvement," said Miss Fronde. "Catherine will stay and help you to take care of them to-day," she added, as she left the room, followed by Owlet.

Immediately after breakfast Roma took leave of the child for the day, and accompanied by her two old friends, walked down the cliff to the beach, where

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the boat lay rocking on the water, with the two boys resting on their oars.

The latter arose and took off their caps and bowed.

Mr. Merritt handed Miss Fronde in; Dr. Washburn followed.

When they were seated the boys laid themselves vigorously to their oars, and the boat sped away across the bay.

It was eight o'clock when they touched the wharf at Snowden.

"You will take the boat immediately back to the isle, boys; we shall not want it here again to-day. We will hire one to take us back this evening. It may be late," said Miss Fronde, as she took leave of her young attendants.

Then with her two stanch friends, Roma walked on to the station, caught the express to Ceciltown, and reached that place at nine o'clock.

CHAPTER XIX

ARRAIGNED

THE morning of June 2, 187—, broadened and brightened into a glorious summer day, smiling over the earth as if there were not a sin or a sorrow in the world.

At an early hour every country road leading into the old colonial town of Cecil Calvert was crowded with the teams of farmers coming in to attend the trial of William Harcourt for the murder of Nathan Yelverton.

By eight o'clock the stable yards of the Calvert House, the principal hotel in Ceciltown, as well as those of the smaller taverns, were filled with horses and carriages of every description, from the old-fashioned chariot down to the humble donkey cart, and the barrooms were crowded with "all sorts and

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conditions of men," from the well-to-do farmers to the poorest laborers.

The liquor dealers did a great business that day.

Crowds collected around the courthouse hours before the doors were thrown open.

When this was done at length, the people surged into the courtroom, and filled every foot of sitting or standing space.

Miss Fronde sat near the counsel's table, with Dr. Washburn on her right and Mr. Merritt on her left.

Still further to the left, on a long bench against the wall, were seated the witnesses who had been subpœnaed for the defense.

Here were venerable men from Harcourt's native county, who had known him from his boyhood to his manhood, and believed him to be gifted with every inherited and acquired moral excellence. Here were the late guests and "habitués" of the Crest House, who had known Harcourt as the hotel clerk, and known no evil of him; had also known Yelverton, and known no good of him.

Here were also the reverend professors of his college, who were ready to testify to his unblemished reputation while at college, his devotion to study, and his severe self-denial.

Finally, here were men from Washington and from New York, ready to swear, to the best of their knowledge, that his acts of eccentricity laid him under strong suspicion of insanity.

Finally, here were the witnesses who had burst open the closed room of Yelverton and found him dead, pistol in hand.

"A host of witnesses," indeed.

At ten o'clock the judge entered and took his seat.

Ten minutes later the prisoner was brought in by a bailiff. He was attended by two of his counsel—Messrs. Keneage and Kent.

Harcourt and his counsel were provided with chairs at the table.

Harcourt bowed to the judge on the bench, and took his seat.

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He was very pale and thin, but perfectly calm and collected. Hundreds of eyes were on him, but he bore the ordeal well.

He turned from all and looked toward Roma.

She was seated but a few feet distant from him.

She met his glance and smiled on him.

He murmured to himself the impassioned lines of the Italian poet:

"Star of my soul! The only eyes
On which I care to gaze!"

and thought no more of the hundreds of rude, curious, critical orbs turned on him.

After the usual preliminaries had been settled, the clerk of the court arose, and, addressing the prisoner, said, in a loud voice that rang through the room:

"William Harcourt, stand up."

And instantly many of the spectators got upon their feet and craned their necks to get a better view of the accused as he should rise to plead to the indictment.

Harcourt stood up and faced the bench.

The State's attorney rose with the indictment in his hand and began to read that intricate and tautological document, stuffed full of such delectable plums as: "Instigated by Satanic agency," "With malice prepense and aforethought," and charging him, the said William Harcourt, with the willful murder of one Nathan Yelverton, at the Crest House, on the Isle of Storms, on the fifteenth day of September, 187—, by shooting him, the said Nathan Yelverton, through his brain with a bullet discharged from a pistol fired by the hand of the said William Harcourt, and thereby inflicting a mortal wound, of which he, the said Nathan Yelverton, did then and there instantly expire and die, etc.

When the reading of this verbose instrument was finished, the State's attorney sat down, and the clerk of the court stood up, and said:

"Prisoner at the bar, you have heard the indictment

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against you read. Are you guilty or not guilty of the felony of which you stand charged?"

"Not guilty," firmly responded Harcourt.

"Sit down."

Harcourt resumed his seat.

The spectators, standing with craning necks, took a more natural attitude, and dropped into their places.

The business of impaneling a jury was commenced. But that proved a slow and difficult process, so that when the hour came for the adjournment of the court, but nine jurors had been secured.

Not until the judge had left the bench, the law officers had followed him, and the prisoner had been removed, would the spectators, still waiting for events, consent to leave the courtroom and go to their farms to feed their cattle and pen their sheep.

Roma had not attempted to approach or speak to Harcourt in the courtroom, lest she should draw upon herself and him more attention than might be agreeable.

But she was among the first to leave the scene, and attended by her two stanch, old friends, walked on toward the jail to see Harcourt there.

She knew that though she might reach the building "after hours," the kind-hearted warden would admit herself and companions.

The three walked fast, and reached the building a few minutes after Harcourt had arrived.

On this occasion they found the young man neither in the sheriff's room nor in his cell, but in the warden's office, engaged in a friendly and cheerful conversation with Mr. Miltimore.

Business hours were over for the day, and there was no one in the room except those two men.

Harcourt sprang up and came forward, and met his friends with cordial welcome.

Warden Miltimore arose and bowed, and placed chairs for the visitors.

The latter had but a few minutes to stay, for it was necessary for them to catch the next train, which

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would be the last to leave Ceciltown for Snowden that night.

These few minutes were spent in cheerful and strengthening conversation.

"I shall be in the courtroom to-morrow, Will, and every day until this severe ordeal is well over. And everyone who has spoken to me on the subject has assured me of a favorable result," said Roma, as she rose to take leave.

"I do not know, dearest! When I surrendered for trial, I braced myself to bear the worst, if required to suffer it. And in contemplating the possibility of that worst, dearest one, I care only for you," he replied.

"Trust me, Will. Trust me in everything. Trust me even to bear with you the worst, if it must come, and to sustain you with my faith, not weigh you down with my grief. Good-by, dear. God bless you!" she said, and left the prison, attended by her old companions.

They had to run to catch their train, and to board it without having bought their tickets at the little station, where there was no obstructing gateman. But they had to pay a higher fare to the conductor.

A rapid run soon brought them to Snowden.

The down train from the North and East was just in.

As Roma and her friends left their seats and stepped out upon the platform, she noticed among the passengers who had just left the down train a plump, fair, rosy-cheeked young woman dressed in rusty black, who was looking about her in a bewildered way. Instinct told Roma that this was Annie Moss.

She went up to her, and said:

"Excuse me; are you looking for anyone?"

"I hardly know whether I have a right to look for anyone, but I thought perhaps that the lady who engaged me to come down here might have sent some one to meet me and to take me over to the Isle of Storms," modestly replied the stranger.

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"It is all right. You are Mrs. Moss, I presume?" said Roma, smiling.

"Oh, yes, miss, that is my name."

"And I am Roma Fronde."

The stranger started in surprise. She had expected to find in Miss Fronde, the wealthy founder of school and sanitarium, an elderly maiden lady of evangelical aspect; and she saw before her a beautiful woman in the glow of youth.

"I am glad to meet you so opportunely. Are you very much fatigued?" inquired Roma.

"Oh, no, miss, not at all," replied buxom Annie.

"Then we will get your baggage wheeled down to the wharf and we will walk down there and take a boat to the isle. Your little friend Owlet will be delighted to see you. Do you know that she was the first to name you to me and propose that I should engage you as matron of our little sanitarium?"

"No, I did not know that. Dear child! I knew her but two days, yet in that time I became so much attached to her that when she was taken away from me I was deeply grieved with the thought that I should never see her again. I have to thank you, miss, for the opportunity of meeting her once more. How is Mr. William, miss, if you please?" suddenly inquired Annie.

"He is well in bodily health, but in some trouble just now, which I will explain to you later. I cannot talk of it now," said Roma.

"I knew he had lost his mother," Annie said.

While they conversed together the two gentlemen stood apart, talking.

Now Roma called them to come, and when they joined her, she introduced Mrs. Moss to them.

They gave the widow a cordial welcome.

Then Roma asked Mr. Merritt if he would kindly take Mrs. Moss' check and get her trunk, and find a porter to wheel it down to the wharf.

Mr. Merritt cheerfully undertook this little service, and soon performed it.

Then the four started to walk down to the wharf.

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There they engaged a large boat, with two sturdy oarsmen.

Annie's trunk was lifted on it.

Then the party entered it and took their seats.

The oarsmen pushed off, and they were soon speeding over the bay on their way to the Isle of Storms.

Half an hour's swift rowing brought them to the isle.

Owlet, who had been standing on the beach watching the approach of the boat, recognized her friend Annie while she was yet "afar off," and began a wild dance and gesticulating with joy and impatience that increased in vehemence and violence until the boat grated on the sands, when, without waiting for the passengers to leave it, and with a wild cry of delight, the child sprang forward and flew into the arms of her friend.

"You dear darling! How glad I am to see you!" said Annie.

The whole party stepped out of the boat.

Annie's trunk was lifted to the beach.

Miss Fronde paid the boatmen, who immediately put about and rowed back across the bay toward Snowden.

Tom and Titus came down the cliff to report for duty.

"I am glad you are here, boys. You can take this trunk and carry it up to the house. If you find it heavy, you can set it down, and rest as often as you like," said Miss Fronde.

The lads went each to each end of the trunk and raised it by its handles with ease.

"Oh! we can carry this without feeling of it," exclaimed Titus, proud of his acquired strength.

Owlet looked at him reproachfully.

"How often have I told you, Titus Blair, that if you tell stories you will go to the dark world?" she demanded.

"Why, what have I been a-telling of now, Miss Catherine?" inquired the boy, pausing with a puzzled look.

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"Barefaced stories! You said you could carry the trunk without feeling it! Now you couldn't even touch it without feeling it!"

"Law, Miss Catherine! if the Lord takes a fellow up as short as you do, he won't stand much chance, he won't!" said poor Titus, as he started with Tom to carry the trunk up the cliff.

The whole party followed, Owlet clinging to Roma's hand.

"Don't you want to walk with 'Mrs. Annie'?" inquired the lady, in a low tone.

"Oh, no! Mrs. Annie is nice and good. I love her dearly. I was awful glad to see her. I think she'll be a comfort to you, Lady. But she ain't you. I want to walk with you, like I always do," whispered Owlet.

"But she is a stranger, and we ought to show her all the affection we can, so as to make her feel less lonely."

"That is so," murmured Owlet, reflectively. "Had I better go and walk with her?"

"I think so, dear."

"Well, one must do one's duty, I suppose," said the child, with a profound sigh, as she dropped behind to the side of Annie, whose unaccustomed limbs were slowly climbing the cliff, using her folded umbrella as an "alpenstock."

"You'll be a mother to Lady like you was to Mr. William and me, won't you, Mrs. Annie?"

"I will try to be useful to her, my dear."

"I would be a mother to her myself, only that I am so little, though I am so old!"

"I thought you told me you were only six last Guy Fawkes' day?"

"Guy Fox's! Yes, that's 'cording to what I've heard. But I don't know what it means, for I'm very old! I have lived so long and seen so much, and everything goes and leaves me behind!"

"What do you mean, love?"

"So many things! There was Parre and the Tay-ee-ta Fong-say, and the mo'sieurs, and spangles, and

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dances, and shampain, and—and things! for years and years and years! And then there was the garret, and cold and hunger, and mamma dying, and I shivering and starving—oh, for years and years and years! And then there was Lady, and lovely rooms, and Titus and Tom, and plenty to eat and drink, and to keep one warm and Santa Clauses and processions—oh, for years and years and years! And then dear mamma went to the bright world. And all that went away and left me behind. And then Goblin Hall and lovely gardens and orchards, and Ducky Darling and birds—oh, for so many, many happy years! And all that went away and I went dead for a while. And then that man who wasn't possessed of common sense, and that ragged lady who smelt enough to knock you down, tormented me for years and years and years! And then Mr. William found me. And you know all about it. And now I have been living a long time here in this beautiful place, where I hope we may live forever. But I didn't want to talk about me. I wanted to talk of Lady. I am worried about her. She is not happy. And Mr. William is in trouble. And I want you to be a mother to both of them."

"What is Mr. William's trouble?" inquired Annie.

"I—I—I think Lady had better tell you. I don't quite understand it myself," said Owlet, gravely.

Annie immediately perceived that she should not have questioned the child on the subject, and said no more.

They had reached the house by this time, and Miss Fronde turned on the threshold to welcome her new inmate.

'Rusalem opened the door, and reported all well in the house.

Miss Fronde in person conducted Annie to her nice room on the same floor with the children's dormitory, and en suite with it, introduced her to the nurses, and showed her the children, who were now all sleeping in their cots.

Tom and Titus brought up the trunk, placed it in Annie's room, and the new matron was duly installed.

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The party retired early.

The next morning Roma, leaving the house in charge of Annie, and accompanied by her two friends, went again to Snowden, to attend the second day of the trial.

CHAPTER XX

ORDEAL

When Miss Fronde and her friends reached the railroad depot at Snowden, they found the train for Ceciltown ready to start, and every car packed with passengers on their way to the county courthouse, to attend the trial of William Harcourt, for the murder of Nathan Yelverton.

Miss Fronde was provided with a seat through the courtesy of a gentleman who resigned his own in her favor.

But Dr. Washburn and Mr. Merritt had to stand up and hang themselves from the straps, all the way from Snowden to Ceciltown.

And all three had to listen to a free-and-easy discussion of the murder of Nathan Yelverton, and the trial of William Harcourt, among their fellow-passengers.

Many of the latter had not attended court on the day previous, but had heard very much exaggerated and very sensational accounts of the persons present, and the proceedings on that occasion.

Moreover, from the talk of Warden Miltimore—who was under no sort of obligation to keep silence on the subject, and who delighted to astonish his neighbors with startling news—the rumor of William Harcourt's and Roma Fronde's betrothal had spread through Ceciltown, and from there all over the county.

And now all the passengers on this train knew that the young man now on trial for his life was engaged

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to be married to the handsomest woman and wealthiest heiress in the State.

But they were far from suspecting that the very plainly dressed and closely veiled lady, sitting so very quietly among them, was the beauty, heiress and betrothed bride in question.

And here let it be explained that Roma Fronde veiled her face, not for any affectation or morbid shrinking from the eyes of her fellow creatures, but for the very practical reason of protecting it from dust and cinders.

Those who had attended the trial on the preceding day, and pretended, or perhaps even imagined, that they had seen her, were extravagant in their praises of the beauty and grace of her person, and the splendor and costliness of her costume!—for these were the sort of people who believe that kings and queens drive about with their "golden crowns" on their heads, and that ladies and gentlemen always wear their best clothes and all their jewels on all public occasions.

They described how she was attended in court by two white-haired, elderly gentlemen—her father and her uncle—who sat beside her, the one on her right hand, and the other on her left. Such were the relations that they quite naturally believed Miss Fronde's two devoted friends bore toward herself.

That their opinions and description were

"Of imagination all compact,"

might be seen in this—that they never once suspected the people they were talking about to be sitting or standing close beside them, their fellow travelers to Ceciltown.

"If I was that young lady's father, or uncle either, I bet you I would put a stop to her making a fool of herself for a young skalawag on trial for his life. Yes, I would, if I had to lock her up in the garret, and keep her on bread and water until he was hung, and put out of everybody's way," declared a tall,

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gaunt, sallow old farmer, with straggling gray hair and beard, hanging down from under a high-crowned, battered, old, black hat.

"It do look like heaving herself away," admitted a slim, sandy-haired, young rustic in his last summer's straw hat and an ill-fitting suit of blue cloth.

"I knew the poor young chap when he was clerking 'long of Tom Todd, who used to keep the Crest House on the Isle of Storms. And a very gentlemanly young fellow he was, too. Looked delicate, though, as if he had had too much work to do and not enough victuals to eat," said a short, fat, bald-headed, good-natured-looking man, in a gray linen suit and a broad-brimmed Panama hat, and who seemed as if he certainly had had enough, and to spare, both to eat and to drink, and very little else to do all the days of his life.

"Oh, yes, I dare say you would get up some sympathy for the fellow. But as for me, I have no pity for murderers. Hang 'em up as high as Haman, I say!" exclaimed the first speaker.

To this and to much more Roma and her friends had to listen; but not one of the three could know how the other two bore the ordeal, as they prudently refrained from looking at each other, lest their faces should reveal them to their strange fellow passengers.

At length, to the great relief of our party, the train reached Ceciltown.

As it "slowed" into the depot, the passengers hurried out of the cars to the platform.

"Now, neighbors, we shall have to fling out our legs pretty lively if we want to see the inside of that courtroom at all," said the gaunt farmer, suiting the action to the word by throwing forward his length of limbs in advance of all the rest in the direction of the courthouse, as if he were competing for the prize in a walking match.

And all his fellow travelers followed him, as if emulating his example. All except three. Roma and her bodyguard purposely lingered behind to let the others get out of the way.

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There was, besides, no danger that Miss Fronde and her friends should lose their seats.

"Their places were kept for them."

Mr. Merritt had seen to it that they should be admitted through a rear door that was never opened to the general public, and that chairs near the counsel table should be reserved for them.

Knowing this, and knowing, besides, that there was half an hour yet to elapse before the opening of the court for the day, the party of three walked leisurely from the depot, passed the grim, gray building of the jail, and on toward the courthouse.

"'Listeners never hear any good of themselves,' it is said, my friends, and certainly we have not heard much good of ourselves, although we were not eavesdroppers, but most innocent because quite involuntary listeners," Roma said, as they straggled along the country road that led from depot to village.

"Oh, we must be prepared for such little unpleasantnesses, under our circumstances," said Mr. Merritt, with a light laugh, that was meant to "make nothing" of the occurrence.

"I hope you do not mind their talk, my dear," added Dr. Washburn.

"Oh, I do not," said Roma, with a profound sigh. "How could I feel such trifles in the midst of such intense anxiety? If I mentioned them, it was not that I cared for them in the least."

They walked on. Though they had got rid of the company of their fellow travelers, they could not escape other foot passengers.

Every country road was pouring its multitudes into the town, as every town street was emptying its crowds into the courthouse.

"Forf of July aine nuffin' to it," they heard one negro say to another of a crowd that was trudging along beside them.

"You bet. Nor de Ague-guttural Fair, nuther," responded one of his companions.

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"Dere nebber was nobody tried fo' deir life yere in dis town fo', were dey, Uncle Horsesfat?" inquired a young negro boy of the last speaker.

"Je-hosh-a-phat! Je-hosh-a-phat, bo-ee!" amended the old negro, with dignity.

"De-horses-fat, den—Uncle Dehorsesfat! An' I say, dere nebber was nobody tried fo' deir life in dis place 'fo', were dey?"

"Not in my time, Pixy. No, nebber. Not likewise hung in dis place. Dis place moughty law-'bidin', God-fearin' place, dis is. Nobody nebber tried fo' deir life yere, nobody nebber hung yere, nor likewise nebber did see sich a crowd, eider on Forf ob July or Ague-guttural Fair, as dere is yere to-day. An' I eighty-eight years ole come nex' Nowember de fortyif," said Jehoshaphat. "But Lor', chillun," he added, "I yeckon dis aine nuffin' to w'at it's gwine fo' to be w'en de hangin' come on."

"Did you ever see a hangin', Uncle Horsesfat?" asked a new voice.

"Jehosh-a-phat, lad! Je-hosh-a-phat!"

"Well, den, Uncle De-horshesfat, did you eber see a man hung?"

"No, Nace. W'ich I nebber did. But w'ich I's heern tell ob hangin's an' de crowds dat follyd arter dem. An' w'ich I's boun' to see dis one, ef I dies fo' it."

"But yo' can't, can yo'? Dey hangs people in de jail yard, doane dey? Seems to me I's heern tell so," said a man who had not spoken before.

"W'at ef dey do, 'Silas De jail yard's got a wall youn' it, fo' true, but it aine got no ruff onto de top ob it. An' den dere's trees an' houses to climb. I's boun' fo' to see dat hangin' ef I dies fo' it."

"I fink yo'll yun a yisk ob doin' dat werry deed ef yo' goes to climbin' trees an' houses in de ole ages ob yo' pilgrimidge," said an old negro woman in the crowd.

"I'll yisk it. I'm boun' to see dat dere hangin'," persisted Jehoshaphat.

"I really do not think you will, my friend," said

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Mr. Merritt, in a tone meant only for the ears of Roma Fronde, who was now leaning on his arm, and whom he felt to be shuddering at the ghastly words of the old negro man.

Just before reaching the courthouse they turned the corner of the street to get around to the rear of the building, where they entered by a back door, went up a flight of back stairs and through an upper door into the courtroom.

The place was packed even more compactly than on the preceding day.

The judge was already on the bench.

The prisoner was seated beside his senior counsel at the table. He looked pale and worn, but perfectly calm.

His face was toward the bench and toward Roma as she entered.

They exchanged bows and smiles as she came forward with her party; and the three took the chairs reserved for them, not far from Harcourt, but on the opposite side of the table.

These positions favored the occasional communication by smiles and glances between the prisoner and his friends.

Roma looked toward the witness bench. In addition to the old planters and others from the neighborhood of Lone Lodge, and the doctors and professors of the University of Virginia, and the late guests of the Crest House, all of whom had known Harcourt and had come prepared to speak the best of him, and who had been pointed out and identified to Miss Fronde on the preceding day, there were some new faces that were strange to her. Among these were several specialists on diseases of the brain; and there was Adler, the New York laborer, whose life Harcourt had saved, but who was now prepared to swear that, to the best of his knowledge and belief, the prisoner had been "a little off" ever since he had known him.

Roma Fronde felt somewhat encouraged by this "host of witnesses" for Harcourt's defense. The busi-

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ness of this second day of the session had already commenced.

The court was still trying to complete the jury. Only one additional juryman had been secured since the preceding day, making the tenth toward the requisite dozen.

But in the next hour the necessary two more were found in the persons of Roma Fronde's fellow travelers, the tall, gaunt, bilious farmer, who gave his name as Jackson Shackleford, and the stout, rosy, good-natured dairyman, who answered to that of Tobias Shuttleworth.

These last were "qualified."

The State's attorney took the indictment from the clerk and proceeded to open the case for the people.

CHAPTER XXI

A SCATHING ACCUSATION

Much has been said of the "poet's license," but the lawyer's license seems to go beyond that.

State's Attorney Dent entirely ignored the statement of facts made by William Harcourt in his deposition before the justice of the peace for Snowden, and proceeded upon a theory of his own, founded upon the terms of the indictment; and, with less regard for the truth than for the success in the conviction of the accused, he drew liberally on his own imagination, as will be seen in the course of his address to the "Gentlemen of the Jury."

I can give you only the barest outline of this.

He gave a very graphic, florid and much exaggerated narrative of the crime of which the prisoner at the bar stood indicted.

He said that on the night of the fifteenth of September, in the preceding year, a tragedy had been enacted, a murder had been perpetrated in a chamber of the Crest House, a then popular summer resort

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of the neighboring Isle of Storms, which had transfixed the whole community with horror, amazement and consternation.

"In the dead waste and middle of the night,"

while the whole of that extensive establishment was buried in repose, the sharp report of a pistol, followed by a piercing shriek of agony, rang through all the halls and corridors of the building, rousing the slumberers from their dreams and sending a thrill of terror through every breast.

Men, women, guests, servants started from their beds in a panic and hurried, half-dressed, to that part of the house whence the alarming sounds had issued.

Their search brought them finally to a chamber in the east annex of the building, then occupied by Mr. Nathan Yelverton, a gentleman of Washington City, who had been sojourning at that famous seaside resort for some weeks prior to that night of the tragedy.

The door was closed.

They listened, but heard no further sound.

They knocked and called, but received no answer.

They burst open the door, and then——

Great Heaven! what a sight of fear and horror met the appalled eyes of the spectators!

There, "weltering in his blood," lay Nathan Yelverton, the honest and honorable man, the accomplished gentleman, the distinguished scholar, the faithful friend, the delightful companion, the cherished guest of the Crest House, the life and light of its social circle—shot through the head! the bullet in his brain! the discharged pistol in his death-stiffened hand!

"Suicide," decided the amazed, and horrified, and very inexperienced and superficial observers.

And "suicide" was echoed by everyone who heard their description of their discovery.

And "suicide," later, confirmed the coroner's jury!

But why should Nathan Yelverton, the handsome, accomplished, wealthy Nathan Yelverton, the idol of society, the favorite of fortune, the envied of men,

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the admired of women, in the prime of life, in the best of health, at the zenith of prosperity, have put an end to his own life, when it held only and promised only honor, happiness and prosperity?

But the first impressions of the discoverers of this tragedy were confirmed, or rather seemed to be confirmed, by circumstances, and these circumstances were—the position of the dead man's body and the condition of his room.

He lay back on his bed, with his right arm dropped down by his side. His brains were blown out. The discharged pistol was clenched fast in his own death-stiffened right hand, from which it required some force to remove it.

The room was securely fastened from within, and had to be burst open. The dead man's purse, watch, jewelry were all found safe.

All this seemed conclusive evidence that no one had entered his room, or could have entered it, for robbery or any other purpose, and that no hand but Yelverton's own had fired the fatal shot that cut short his life and roused all the inmates of the house, striking terror into every heart.

And so the verdict of suicide was rendered alike by the first discoverers of the dead body, by the coroner's jury, and by the general public.

It never seemed to occur to these investigators that there could be any other solution of the question as to how Nathan Yelverton came by his death—that it might have been by the hand of an assassin, that the discharged pistol, after it had done its deadly work, might have been placed in the victim's hand immediately after death, and his fingers bent and closed upon it to stiffen there, and furnish evidence—false, misleading evidence of suicide; that the windows, "closed from within," were closed by spring locks, so that the murderer, after having posed his victim as a suicide, might have locked and bolted the door on the inside, then escaped through the open window, pushed the shutters in to make the spring lock catch and fasten them, so that no one could open them from

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without, and by these simple tricks give to the awful tragedy the seeming of the suicide of a solitary man in a closely-fastened room, fastened from within.

And so the first discoverers of the body, the coroner's jury, and public opinion alike, branded the brow of Nathan Yelverton, the joyous and brilliant idol of society, with the awful crime of self-slaughter!

Was ever wrong so foul and cruel wrought on man!

Was it not enough—ought it not to have been enough, to cut him off from existence in the prime of manhood, in the joy of life, without sending him to his grave in infamy? One would think that the sacrifice of his happy life might have been enough to satiate the most blood-thirsty hatred! But no! he must die and be dishonored in death!

He was a suicide, all said.

But what was the truth?

Ask that pallid, shuddering, conscience-stricken culprit at the bar of retributive justice! Yes, ask him! Ask him who was the midnight assassin, who waited and watched until every innocent inmate of the house was sunk in repose, until all was still and dark, and then, stealing from his lair in the basement of the building, creeping like his prototype, the serpent, through all the deserted halls and corridors, he reached at length the door of his destined victim's chamber. He entered it by means of his pass-key, that pass-key which had been intrusted to him for the greater protection of the guests of the house, in the event of fire, sudden and helpless illness, or any other exigency that justified the use of it in entering the private rooms of inmates; but which was now degraded and perverted from its purpose by being made the means to the destruction of one of the most esteemed among the visitors of the house!

The assassin steals silently into this chamber of peace, finds his intended victim sleeping serenely, creeps noiselessly to his side, stands close, close to him, holds his breath while he draws the pistol, takes deliberate aim at the head of the sleeping, unconscious, helpless man, pulls the trigger, sends the

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bullet through his brain! The victim dies without a struggle, without awaking. The murderer—oh! the cold-blooded caution of that inhuman monster!—slips the discharged weapon into the nerveless hand of the murdered man, closes the fast-stiffening fingers around it, locks the door and escapes by the window, pushes in the shutters, which fasten with a spring, and so leaves the murdered man with the false evidence of suicide around him, death, followed by dishonor!

Here the orator of the Maryland bar paused to take breath, drew from his vest pocket a white cambric handkerchief, passed it several times across his forehead, looking furtively to note the effect of his eloquence on the "gentlemen of the jury."

Apparently his observation was satisfactory, for he proceeded with renewed inspiration.

Yelverton is in his grave! No one, not even his next of kin, or best of friends, questions the truth of the verdict rendered by the coroner's jury, however greatly and grievously they may be puzzled to find a motive for the "rash act."

The coroner's jury have settled the matter forever. The murderer is as safe from the law as if he had never done that deed of hell!

Safe from the law?

Yes, but not safe from punishment!

Pursued by the bloodhounds of guilt, remorse and fear, there is no peace for him by day or night, on land or sea!

Blood! They will have blood! Blood for blood! they cry, and hound him on and on, and hunt him down and down, until he falls, face in the dust, at the feet of justice.

"Gentlemen of the jury," he said, in conclusion, "the conviction of the prisoner will not depend upon his own partial confession, made to soothe the pangs of conscience, or his own special pleading, inspired by fear of the law's utmost penalty. After having made before a justice of the peace for this county a deposition upon which he was indicted by the grand

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jury to answer the charge of willful murder, he pleads to this charge, at this bar—'Not guilty!' This looks inconsistent; and we will proceed to prove, by a host of witnesses, that he is guilty, even as indicted. Let Thomas Todd take the stand."

The burly late landlord of the Crest House rolled into view, and took position.

Being sworn, he testified that his name was Thomas Todd; age, fifty years; that he was a native of Annapolis, Maryland, and late proprietor of the Crest House, Isle of Storms.

He was on the premises there on the night of the fifteenth of September past. He was in bed and asleep, when about two o'clock in the morning he was awakened by the loud report of a pistol. He jumped out of bed, hurried on some clothes, and ran in the direction from which he heard the shot.

Other inmates of the house joined him, and by the time they reached the corridor running through the eastern annex they found every room there opened except that of Yelverton, which was fast closed, and before which a great crowd had collected, and where they were rapping and calling for admittance. Several spoke up and said that it was from this room the report of the pistol had been heard.

"Being the proprietor," continued the witness, "and finding that all the knocking and calling failed to elicit any response, I gave orders that the door should be broken open. When that was done we all entered, and found Nathan Yelverton dead in his bed, a shot wound in his forehead, his head in a puddle of blood, and a pistol clinched in his stiff hand."

"What was the condition of the room?" inquired the prosecutor.

"All in order, and closely fastened up, except in the case of the door, which had been broken open by my directions to admit the crowd to see what was the matter. Yelverton's watch, chain, diamond sleeve buttons and studs were found lying on the top of the bureau, and afterward his purse was found safe in his trousers pocket."

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"You say the room was secured from within. Were the fastenings of the window shutters of the Crest House so arranged that they could be shut and fastened from without, and not again unfastened from without?" inquired the State's attorney.

"Those of the annex in which Mr. Yelverton slept were so arranged, with spring catches, but not those of the main building, old Guyon Hall, where the windows were all provided with heavy iron bolts on the inside," replied the witness.

"Was the window of Mr. Yelverton's room fitted with one of those spring catches?"

"Yes, sir; all the windows in the annex were fitted in that way."

"I ask you especially if those of the deceased's window were so arranged?"

"Yes, sir; they were."

"They could be pushed to and securely fastened from without?"

"Yes, sir; they could. They caught in with a strong spring."

"Could they be reopened from without?"

"No, sir; they couldn't—without being broken."

"Could a man, after having locked the door of that room on the inside, and left the key in the lock, and escaped through the window, have pushed to the shutters and fastened them from without so securely as to create the appearance of a room fastened from within?"

"Yes, sir; he could."

"Could the murderer of Yelverton have so left the room, and so covered it, giving it the appearance of a room fastened from within?"

"Yes, sir; he could, if there was such an one—and covered up all his tracks behind him, too."

"At the coroner's inquest why did you not mention this fact in relation to the fastenings of the window shutters?"

"It never occurred to my mind to do so. It would not have occurred to me to do so now if you had not asked me about them."

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"Was the prisoner at the bar summoned as a witness at the coroner's inquest?"

"No, sir."

"Do you know why he was not summoned?"

"No, sir; but only those who entered Yelverton's room and discovered his dead body were called to testify."

"Was not the prisoner among those who entered that room?"

"No, sir; but he was in the great crowd outside."

"You saw him there, did you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did he, the prisoner, exhibit any unusual signs of agitation?"

"Everyone there was excited more or less, sir. I did not notice that Mr. Harcourt was more upset than anybody else."

"What was his manner and appearance on the day of the coroner's inquest?"

"If I was to die for it, sir, I could not tell you. I had something else to think of that day besides watching my clerk's countenance, when there was the dead body of a gentleman who had been murdered in my house, lying on his bed, and the whole place overrun with a crowd of people from Snowden and every part of the surrounding country, brought together by the news of the tragedy, and all my guests getting ready to leave as soon as the inquest should be over."

"Well, then, in the days that followed the inquest?"

"What about 'em, sir?"

"Did you notice anything peculiar about the manners and appearance of the prisoner?"

"Well, yes, I am bound to say that I did. He looked pale and nervous and harassed—very much so indeed; and that absent-minded that sometimes I had to speak to him several times before I could get a word out of him. But I set it all down to overwork, because after that unpleasant occurrence my hundreds of guests began to skip away pretty lively, and my clerk was kept pretty busy both day and night making out their accounts."

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A few more unimportant questions were asked, and then Thomas Todd was allowed to leave the witness stand.

CHAPTER XXII

TWO UNEXPECTED WITNESSES

Mark Simpson was the next name called.

And to the surprise of Harcourt, his old acquaintance, the night watchman of the Crest House—whom he had passed and supposed to be sleeping, in the main hall of the building, on the night of the tragedy—appeared and took the stand.

Being sworn and examined under oath, he deposed that:

His name was Mark Simpson, his age eighteen, his residence Snowden. He was night watchman of the Crest House. He was on duty in the great hall of that house on the fifteenth of September of the last year, the night of the death of Yelverton. He went on duty at eleven o'clock. By one o'clock all the guests of the house, except one, had left the public rooms and retired to their own, and all the lights were out except the hanging lamp in the hall, which burned all night, and the light in the office, where the deceased and the prisoner were engaged in playing cards.

He had unfortunately, being very much fatigued, dropped asleep; but was easily awakened, as he was a light sleeper. He was awakened by the clock striking two, when he saw Mr. Yelverton pass him and go upstairs. Afterward he heard Mr. Harcourt walking up and down the office floor, groaning and talking to himself. He thought Mr. Harcourt had been losing money to Yelverton, and felt sorry for the clerk. After a while all was still in the office, and he thought Mr. Harcourt had gone to bed, as he slept on the sofa in that room.

He fell asleep again, and was soon awakened by a

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stealthy step along the hall. He opened his eyes and saw that it was only Mr. Harcourt, who looked deadly pale and haggard and wild under the light of the lamp, and he carried his pass-key in his hand. Witness saw the pass-key distinctly, for it gleamed under the lamp-light. He knew it because it was of peculiar shape, and he had seen no other one like it.

He did not speak to Mr. Harcourt, but saw him go up the stairs.

Afterward he did not sleep on his post again that night. In about fifteen minutes more he heard the pistol shot that roused the whole house. It came from the eastern annex, and he started and ran upstairs. Just as he reached the landing, he met Mr. Harcourt coming up the back stairs looking frightfully white and distraught, like a man out of his mind. He thought it strange and suspicious, but said nothing. He could not get near Yelverton's door for the crowd that filled up all the corridor leading to it. Witness had not been summoned before the coroner's inquest. And had not spoken to anyone of what he had seen until summoned here.

This whole testimony was considered very damaging to the prisoner.

Mark Simpson left the stand, and was succeeded by another witness, who, being duly sworn and questioned by the State's attorney, deposed that:

His name was Peter Sands. His age, fifty years. His residence, Washington, D. C. He knew the deceased, Nathan Yelverton, and the prisoner at the bar, William Harcourt.

He was a guest at the Crest House at the time of the murder or suicide of Nathan Yelverton. On the night of the fifteenth of September of last year, he was in bed in his room in the western annex. Being very heated and restless, he arose about two o'clock, got through his window onto the porch that ran along that annex, went down the stairs at the end of the porch, and around by the easter annex, where, in a grove of trees, there were hammocks swung. No one was there, and he got into one of them. He

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was swinging in the shadow, and gazing idly at the annex, whose whole front was bathed in moonlight, when suddenly he heard a pistol shot ring out. He glanced down toward the end of the annex whence the sound proceeded, and started out of his hammock to give the alarm. As he neared the annex, he saw the shutters of Nathan Yelverton's room open, and a man hurry out, close the shutters behind him, run along to the end of the roof of the shed, under the annex windows, and glide down by the post to the ground. He recognized the man distinctly as William Harcourt, the hotel clerk. Harcourt never looked behind him, or saw the witness; he ran around to the rear of the main building and disappeared.

Witness hurried to the house, but was long in gaining admittance, as everyone about the establishment had congregated in the neighborhood of Yelverton's room.

He never saw the dead body of the deceased, and never was called to testify before the coroner's jury.

"It seems that no witness who could tell anything about the murder was called," said the State's attorney. "But why did you not go forward voluntarily to give such important testimony?"

"Because I am so opposed to capital punishment that I am not going to help hang a man if I can avoid doing so."

"You may take your seat."

Peter Sands retired, and was followed by several other witnesses, in turn, whose testimony was unimportant, except inasmuch as it corroborated that of Thomas Todd in the items of the night alarm, leading to the discovery of Nathan Yelverton's dead body; the position of the deceased and the condition of the room in which they found him, leading to the theory of suicide.

These were the last witnesses examined for the prosecution.

"Enough," the State's attorney said, "to convict the prisoner of willful murder without the help or hin-

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drance of his own partial confession or special pleading."

This closed the case for the presecution.

The court took a recess.

The spectators kept their seats for fear of losing them. Many took out luncheon baskets which they had brought, and regaled themselves.

Refreshments were furnished to the jury in their box. They did not leave the courtroom.

Harcourt was conducted to the sheriff's room, where he was soon joined by his counsel and by Roma and her friends.

Here again they talked over the case, and expressed much surprise at the appearance of the two new witnesses, Simpson and Sands, and wondered how they had been procured.

"No doubt," said Mr. Merritt, "these men, after the closing of the house, gossiped about what they had seen, and this reached the ears of some detective sent to the neighborhood by the State's attorney to hunt up evidence."

"Their testimony bore very heavily upon me, as did the address of the State's attorney," said Harcourt, in a depressed tone of voice.

Roma immediately left her seat between her two old friends and went over and seated herself beside the sorrowful speaker, took his hand in both hers and looked into his face with eyes full of sympathy, strength and encouragement, but without a word uttered.

"Oh, don't mind Dent. He is well known to be the most high-flown romancer as well as the most florid orator of the Maryland bar. He overshoots his mark generally, and so misses his aim. As for these two witnesses, if you will think for a moment, you will see that they have only pointed at facts that you yourself have stated under oath," said Mr. Keneage.

Harcourt shook his head despondently.

Mr. Merritt laughed and inquired:

"Have you ever before been present at a trial for murder?"

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"Never!" responded Harcourt.

"I thought not, or you would have known that the opening address of the prosecuting attorney, on such an occasion, is a mere Bombastes Furioso formula—a matter of course. He believes your own account of the death of Yelverton. He don't believe one word of his own version."

"Then why does he give it?" naturally enough demanded Harcourt.

Mr. Merritt laughed again and answered:

"Why, because he believes it to be his duty as well as his interest to convict you if he can."

"Right or wrong?"

"Right or wrong. But he believes it to be right. He is the State's attorney, and bound to score a victory for the State if he can. He has never hung a man yet. He longs to do so. But he won't hang you, my boy. If there were the slightest chance of it I could not speak as cheerfully as I do. Just wait until old Keneage here makes his opening speech. It will be glorious to see how this old lion of the law will wring and toss, rend and tear him and his argument, until not a shred is left of either," said Mr. Merritt, with an amused laugh, that sent encouragement into the hearts of Will and Roma.

"Yet I have heard that John Dent is celebrated for his successful convictions," said Dr. Washburn, with less tact than might have been expected of him.

"Yes," unwillingly asserted Mr. Merritt; "but not in capital cases. Besides, he never yet met Hiram Keneage.

"'He never did encounter with Glendower!
He durst as well have met the devil alone
As Owen Glendower for an enemy.'"

The poetical quotation was supplemented by a prosaic occurrence.

The messenger who had been dispatched to the nearest restaurant returned, followed by waiters bearing trays laden with a sufficient luncheon for the whole party.

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The old doctor and the lawyers enjoyed the repast. They had all passed the age when excitement takes away appetite. But Roma Fronde and Will Harcourt could make little more than a pretense of eating.

CHAPTER XXIII

A HIDDEN WITNESS

At two o'clock the judge resumed his seat on the bench, and the prisoner was brought into court, attended by his friends.

Now the celebrated barrister, Hiram Keneage, opened the defense.

I dare not attempt to give even the briefest epitome of his argument, but only hint at its general drift.

He referred to the prisoner at the bar as the son of a heroic soldier, a devoted patriot, who had freely pledged and lost his life in the cause of his country.

His client, he said, was a young man who had inherited and cultivated a high sense of honor, a pure integrity of character. One to whom it was impossible and preposterous to impute crime; one filled with a noble ambition to achieve a position in the ranks of illustrious men which should be worthy of the name he bore and the race from which he sprang.

To do this he had to struggle against obstacles, hard, difficult, almost insurmountable; to overcome them, he had to practice the most severe self-denial, while devoting himsef to incessant study.

Here the counsel gave a graphic picture of Harcourt's life at Williamsburg, where, while attending college, when he lived in one poor room, he did all his own work, and allowed himself scarcely enough nourishment to keep body and soul together. Was it a marvel, he asked, that a highly sensitive and delicate organization should have succumbed and broken down under such a terrible ordeal? He did break down.

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He was advised by the medical faculty of his own alma mater to shut up his books, forget his studies, and go to the seaside for rest and recreation. But that advice to him was like the humorous prescription of port wine and roast pheasant for the starving Lazarus.

He could not afford to go to the seaside, except as the paid servant of some hotel. He was offered the place of clerk at the Crest House, on the Isle of Storms, and he accepted it.

He went there. Better had he gone to his grave. Better had he followed his brave father, his young brothers and fair sisters "to that bourne from which no traveler returns," than to have entered the doors of the Crest House, which proved to him the very gates of death and hell.

It was not that he fell into a very convivial set. He had been used to convivial life, if not in his own person, yet in his home from his childhood up to the time of his father's death on the field of battle. Col. Everard Harcourt had kept open house with princely hospitality, in the days before the war.

No! but that he was drawn into the toils of a ruthless, consummate, unscrupulous villain. Goethe's Mephistopheles, Dante's Gerion, Milton's Satan were prototypes of this order of monster, half beast, half devil.

But let the young man now tell the tale of his temptation in his own way.

He need never have told it at all. But that a singularly sensitive conscience influenced him to seek "judgment and a judge" at the hands of his fellow men. "Judgment and a judge" for him must mean justice and mercy. And justice and mercy in his case are convertible terms.

Nothing that might be said could give additional force to the pathos of the story of a young life's wreck, which they would presently hear.

"William Harcourt will take the stand."

Every man, woman and child—for there were even children among the spectators—arose, stood upon

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their tip-toes, and craned their necks to get a sight of the young prisoner. Very few could succeed in doing so.

Those who did saw only a pale, thin young man, with curly, dark hair, and very large, dark eyes.

Harcourt told his story in a plain, straightforward way—"nothing extenuating"—the story of the midnight tragedy at the Crest House, on the Isle of Storms, with which our readers are so familiar that it need not be repeated here.

He was sharply cross-examined upon the subject of motives as well as actions. But as he had told "a plain, unvarnished tale" from the first, he did not contradict himself or vary a hair's breadth from his original statement.

His deposition occupied but an hour.

Roma had watched the faces of the jurymen, and thought she saw that their sympathies were with the prisoner.

A host of witnesses followed in succession, and testified to the moral excellence of William Harcourt's character.

There were venerable men from the neighborhood of Lone Lodge, who had known him from his boyhood—and among these Drs. Lathrop and Wall and the Rev. John Ralph, rector of the Episcopal Church of St. Mary's at Logwood, who had been with his mother in her last illness.

There were the professors of his college—

"Most potent, grave and reverend seigniors,"

who testified to his exemplary character and conduct while in college.

After these came some of the late guests of the Crest House, who bore witness to the good conduct of the prisoner while acting as clerk of the hotel.

One of the most effective witnesses was a gentleman who had been present in the office with Harcourt and Yelverton on the night when they played

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that fatal game which had led to the ruin of one and to the death of the other.

He testified that he had surreptitiously watched the game to see if he could discover Yelverton's method, and that he had detected the trickery by which the sharper so manipulated the cards as to make them do whatever he should please.

And here he clearly explained the sleight-of-hand by which he had changed cards so as to give his young antagonist the first flattering winnings, and so lead him on to stake larger sums and win larger sums, until, by one final grand coup, he "turned the tables," and in the language of his clique, he "cleaned" the victim out.

He—the witness—left the office before the game was ended, but without a doubt as to how it would end and how it did end.

This was the last witness for the defense.

Roma Fronde turned around and looked at the jurymen, to see, if she could, how they had been impressed.

Her observation was not encouraging.

Altogether they looked very grave, as perhaps they ought to have looked. But one juror—Shackleford—looked grim and gaunt and bilious, and muttered to his next neighbor something to the effect that it was "easy to throw dirt on a dead lion."

Mr. Merritt watched this juror with serious misgivings.

"No one can help seeing," he mused, as he stroked his bearded chin, "that the accused man has little to hope from that juror. Really, really, one of the questions put to a man before he is allowed to go on the jury, should be as to whether he is troubled with bile, and, if the answer be affirmative, he should be rejected at once."

State's Attorney Dent was about to rise and make mincemeat of the defense, counsel, witnesses and all, when a messenger pushed through the crowd of spectators, came up to Mr. Keneage and put a folded note in his hand.

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The lawyer opened and read it, changed countenance, and exclaimed to the judge:

"Your honor, I must crave the patience of the court. There is an important witness for the defense, who has just arrived."

He stepped back into the crowd behind, and soon reappeared, accompanied by a man who was a stranger to all but about half a dozen persons present, and they were of our own party.

Again every man, woman and child among the spectators rose, stood on tiptoes, and craned his or her neck to catch a glimpse of the new "important" witness for the defense. But to little purpose. They could only see the back of a very beautiful head, adorned with very carefully dressed blond hair, a black kid gloved hand carrying a silk hat with a broad band of crape around its crown. The new witness seemed to be clothed in deep mourning.

Symptoms of stiff neck, not to say dangerous symptoms of cerebro-spino-meningitis, compelled the spectators to relax their strained muscles and resume their seats.

Then Hiram Keneagè said, in a clear, ringing, confident voice:

"William Hanson will take the stand."

Hanson stepped forward, met the eyes of Roma Fronde and bowed to her, and then bowed to Harcourt, who sat staring at him as if transfixed.

Hanson then took the stand.

CHAPTER XXIV

WILLIAM HANSON

SURELY the proverb, that "it is the unexpected which will happen," was never more forcibly illustrated than by the appearance of William Hanson on the stand as a witness for the defense, in the trial of

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William Harcourt for the murder of Nathan Yelverton.

To explain his presence there, it will be necessary to go back a little, and take up the story of his life from the day on which he lost little Owlet.

And now, and here, perhaps, is the best time and place in which to refer to those baleful moral influences which had combined to deform the spirit of William Hanson, and to make of a young man, who really had not inherited an evil nature from his progenitors, a complete, detestable, confirmed egotist—a self-lover, self-worshiper, self-seeker, whose first, and last, and only thought, whose all-absorbing thought was Self.

In the first place, "he was the only son of his mother, and she was a widow," the youthful widow of an aged millionaire.

William Hanson, the elder, died at the age of seventy-seven, leaving a widow of twenty-seven years, and an only child, an infant son of seven moths old, leaving also a fortune of fifteen millions, divided, by will, just as the probate court would have divided it by law, had no will existed—that is to say, he bequeathed one-third of that fortune, or five millions of dollars, to his widow, and two-thirds, or ten millions, to his only child, this infant son.

The foolish young mother worshiped her son, and indulged his every whim, thus laying the foundation of a character in which self was to be the idol, to which all must bend.

Yet, with all this, the boy did not entirely fill the woman's heart; for, in the third year of her widowhood, and before the child was three years old, she gave her hand to Reuben Bushe, a young banker, who was himself too rich to be tempted by the young widow's millions, had he not been also attracted by her beauty.

He was certainly devotedly attached to his beautiful wife, and their marriage was a perfectly happy union. But it was all too brief. The fair bride scarcely survived her honeymoon.

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And the heartbroken young husband found his only solace in his little stepson, the golden-haired, blue-eyed orphan boy of three summers, whom, with her last dying breath, his wife had confided to his care.

Fond memory of his beloved wife and compassion for the motherless babe combined to convert young Reuben Bushe into as doting a daddy as ever ruined a child by too much indulgence.

Even when the bereaved young husband had been a widower for three years, and his friends began to talk to him of a second marriage, he declared that he would never seek a second wife, but live for "his boy," who should be his son and his heir.

Yet, "when all has been said in favor of constancy to the departed, a loving heart must love," writes a modern philosopher. And so it proved with Reuben Bushe. He met Mary Gray at a very quiet seaside resort, to which he had taken his boy.

He had met many young, unmarried women, and was always meeting them, but under different circumstances.

It was the beautiful boy who first made Miss Gray's acquaintance, and afterward introduced his papa to her.

And the three soon became inseparable companions.

Before the year was out, Mary Gray became Mrs. Reuben Bushe.

And golden-haired Willie had two worshipers instead of one; for the happy young couple always declared that the dear child made the match; and I think they were right.

Even the next year, when their only child, Rebecca, was born, she did not—to use the nursery phrase—"put his nose out of joint" the least bit. She grew to be a third worshiper of the little millionaire, who, in the eyes of his idolators, was only the poor little orphan boy.

Even in after years, when the child Rebecca began to perceive and to complain that undue favor was

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always shown her brother, the parents—one or the other of them—would plead, pathetically:

"Poor Willie! He has no father nor mother, Reba. We should all be very kind to him."

One day Reba fell into disgrace by replying:

"Well, then, I wish to the Lord that you were his father and mother instead of mine, and then maybe I might get a chance."

But the former plea usually sealed all questions.

But, ah me! all these influences combined to lead the little monster to believe that the world and all the people in it must have been made especially for him.

At school and college he might have received better lessons in life from contact with his classmates, who, as a rule, had no more respect for rank and riches than they had for learning and authority; but if Hanson was wealthy, he was also generous, and he possessed the amiability and good humor of perfect health; so that he was popular almost to the idolatry of his companions.

When he left college and entered society, it goes without saying that his almost fabulous wealth made him an idol there also.

But his heart remained untouched by the attractions of the fairest women until, in the quiet of their home, he met his sister's school friend, Roma Fronde.

He loved her, and waited for her to leave school before he should propose to her.

He never for one moment doubted that she would accept him.

It was the year after, when both himself and his sister were guests at Goblin Hall, that he first offered himself to Miss Fronde.

And the very first "setback" he had ever had in his life was when his offer was "declined with thanks."

He could scarcely believe in the refusal. He could not in the least understand it.

He was even more mortified and enraged than grieved or disappointed.

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And he was more than ever resolved to have his own arrogant, egotistical will.

But when he found that a poor student, whose family had been ruined by the war, and who filled up all his holidays by teaching or clerking to pay his college fees, had been preferred before him, the favorite of fortune, the idol of society, for whom the world and all that was in it existed, his disgust and abhorrence of the situation knew no bounds.

He heard from his sister, the confidante of Roma Fronde, that the accepted lover was the hotel clerk at the Crest House, Isle of Storms.

He went down there to see with his own eyes this young man, who, though so poor and insignificant from a worldly point of view, must have possessed the most wonderful personal graces and attractions to have won the hand and heart of this queen of beauty, Roma Fronde, who had been vainly wooed by such a Crœsus and such an Apollo as himself.

Will Harcourt was, of course, the first man he met and spoke with at the Crest House. He found him behind the railed-in counter of the hotel office.

And now just imagine his surprise and contempt when he saw in his favored rival not the Adonis he expected to see, but a pale, thin, dark young fellow, whose only beauty was his wonderful eyes, and who was clothed in a shabby suit of cheap black alpaca.

That this "cad" should be preferred before him, William Hanson, the young millionaire, the idol of women! the envy of men! the admiration of the world! It was disgusting, abhorrent, humiliating in the extreme.

He would not accept the situation, he said. He could not. Not only for his own sake, he told himself, but for Miss Fronde's, he must deliver her from this entanglement.

And, surely, if he should give his mind to the business, he could do it.

When did he, William Hanson, ever fail in anything he ever attempted?

Of course he did not stop to reflect that he had

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never in his life attempted anything the least difficult, or that could not be accomplished by proxy, or by money, or by both.

Satan and his devils, who stand as ready to help evil resolutions as the Lord and his angels to help good ones, brought about circumstances that placed the life and honor of William Harcourt and, through him, the life and honor of his best beloved in the power of William Hanson by making the latter an eye witness to the death of Nathan Yelverton.

He had purposely avoided the possibility of being summoned as a witness before the coroner's inquest by keeping away from the vicinity of the room of the tragedy while the crowd were breaking into it that night, and by going away in the early boat that was sent to Snowden to fetch the coroner the next morning, and by which Charles Cutts, the Baltimore broker, also left the house.

When all was over, the verdict of suicide rendered, and the body of the murdered man shipped to Washington for burial in the family plot in the Congressional Cemetery, and William Harcourt seemed safe from the law, then William Hanson descended upon him like Nemesis and demanded the hand of Roma Fronde as the price of his secrecy.

Our readers know the whole of that dreadful episode in the life of the betrothed pair; and they know how signally Hanson was defeated in the hour of his seemingly assured success by the heroism of Roma Fronde; how futile were all his subsequent attempts to get, through any means, the control of that fearless and resolute girl; even how his last desperate resort, the abduction of little Owlet, had not only utterly failed of its object, but had resulted in saddling him with the burden of a troublesome child, for the charge of whom he was, perhaps, the most unfitted of all men in the whole world.

Hanson was beginning to grow thoroughly weary of the pursuit of this "far-off, unattainable" woman.

If he had been a man of very strong passions he

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must have experienced the reaction that such men undergo, and had his love turned to hate.

But, being rather a weak egotist, he was only mortified and disgusted with his "luck."

He no longer thought of waylaying Roma Fronde and going to Europe on the same boat with her.

"Let her go," he said to the detective, whom he had employed to watch her, and who had now returned to New York defeated. "Let her go to the bottom, if she will."

But what should he do with the child?

He finally determined to keep Owlet until the return of his mother and sister, tell them some made-up story about the child, and seek their advice and assistance in providing for her.

It may be remembered that on the evening of one day he was engaged to go to a dinner party.

He went.

The company stayed late, and he was among the very latest to take leave.

It was half-past one when he returned to his apartments at the Asterick.

As the hour was so late he did not care to open the door that separated his own spacious chamber from the child's little bedroom, as was his custom on other nights.

He went immediately to bed and to sleep, and slept far into the next morning.

When he awoke at length, it was to a consciousness of something different—something wanting in his surroundings, and soon he perceived that the difference lay in the unusual stilless of his apartment, and the deficiency in the absence of the child's and the nurse's voices, as he was accustomed to hear them on waking in the morning.

He felt vexed with the suspicion that the nurse had taken the liberty to walk out with the carefully guarded child.

He rose, drew on his dressing gown, thrust his feet into slippers, crossed the room, opened the communicating door and looked into Owlet's little nest.

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The little room was in perfect order, the little bed made, as could be vaguely seen through its falling curtains of sheer white muslin, and the nurse sat by the open, white-draped window, engaged in needlework.

But Owlet was nowhere to be seen.

"Mrs. Gilbert," he said.

The nurse rose calmly, laid aside her needlework, and answered, quietly:

"Yes, sir. Is the little miss awake? Shall I bring her in and dress her, sir?"

"What do you mean? I don't understand you. Where is the child? Go and find her at once!"

Mrs. Gilbert left the room, and Hanson returned to his own apartment, and began to dress himself.

By the time his toilet was completed, Mrs. Gilbert returned to the rooms with a countenance full of dismay.

"I can't find her anywheres, sir!" she said.

Hanson was very much annoyed, yet not much alarmed.

"She is probably in some of the women's rooms. Go and make further inquiries, and for the future keep better watch over the child, or I shall be obliged to find some one who will do so."

The nurse sighed and left the room once more.

Hanson went downstairs to the breakfast room. When he had breakfasted he went to Owlet's room.

He found the nurse in the apartment and—in hysterics.

"What is the matter with you, woman? And where is Catherine?" he sternly inquired.

"Oh, sir! I can't say! I don't know! She ain't anywheres in the house, and nobody haven't seen her. The clerk, he sent the bell boy around to every room in the house to inquire, sir, and she ain't in none of them, and nobody kows anything about her. There hasn't been the sign of her seen, nor yet heard in the house this morning, sir," said the sobbing woman.

Hanson dropped into a chair, placed his hands on his knees, leaned back and stared at the distressed

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woman in a manner calculated to deprive her of the last remnant of self-possession. After learning all he could of her, Hanson went downstairs to make more particular inquiries than he supposed the nurse had been able to institute.

But his inquiries elicited no more information than those of the nurse had hone.

No one had seen or heard of the child since the previous afternoon, when she had come in from her drive in the park with her guardian and her nurse.

Had Hanson been the complete villain that some of his acts would have stamped him to be, he might have rejoiced at the disappearance of Owlet, and hoped that she might never reappear.

But few, if any, human beings are utterly evil, and William Hanson was not one of these.

He was an egotist, who had never in all his life been led to take thought of others; who had never had a sorrow to teach him sympathy. He was not past redemption, but he needed the discipline of suffering.

Though he really did not love this child, yet, when through his tampering with her health by the administration of drugs, he had endangered her life, he nursed her tenderly, and engaged the most eminent physician and the most skillful nurse to attend her, and rejoiced when their efforts restored her to health.

Now, tthough he had found that she could not be used as a decoy to lure Roma Fronde into his power, and though he was heartily tired of such an incumbrance and unusual appendage to a bachelor's establishment as a baby girl, now that she was lost, instead of feeling relieved and rejoiced, he felt grieved and anxious.

And now his next move was to go to the poliece headquarters and give information of the loss of the child, and offer a reward for her recovery.

When requested to give a description of her person, he endeavored to do so; but to say that the missing child was a little girl of about six years of age, pale and thin from recent illness, with large, brown eyes,

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and a cloud of red-brown hair, was not to give a very graphic portrait, since there were hundreds of children in the great city that would answer the above description.

But when, in answer to acute questioning, he added that she had an unusually broad, full forehead, answered to the name of Owlet, and if questioned more than she approved, would be very likely to enlighten her questioner as to his deficiency in the possession of common sense, he furnished the police with some points of individuality in the lost child to direct them.

To give a description of the clothes she wore in her flight, Hanson had to refer to Mrs. Gilbert, the nurse.

But that good woman, after having made a thorough search through the child's bureau drawers, reported that that provident little possessor of common sense had taken away all her favorite dresses and ornaments, and that it was impossible to know which she had worn on her person.

Therefore the only additional items of description that could be given to the police was that the little girl was well dressed, and carried a bundle in her hand.

But even with this scant description it did not take "the finest police in the world" long to trace the little fugitive to her refuge.

It was only on the second morning after the discovery of her flight that an officer called at the hotel and desired to see Mr. Hanson.

He found the young man at home, and brought the intelligence that the lost child had been found early in the morning of the preceding day by a young workman named Williams, under the front stoop of the tenement house in which he lodged. The child was in the most deplorable condition, clothed in rags, and half starved. She had been taken in and clothed and fed by the young workman and his fellow lodger, a respectable seamstress. The child had told an incoherent tale about her having been stolen from a Miss Fronde, of Goblin Hall. And the young work-

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man, who seemed to know something of the parties in question, and doubtless in the hope and expectation of winning a large reward, had volunteered to take her home and restore her to her friends. And he had left New York with the child that morning on the seven o'clock train for Washington.

That was all the officer could tell Hanson.

The latter asked for the address of the woman who had succored the forlorn child and given this information, and when he had obtained it, he went in person to see Annie Moss and verify the policeman's report.

He did not make himself known as the guardian of the child, from whom she had run away. It was not pleasant to pose as a child-stealer, even before such an humble and inoffensive unit as the poor seamstress.

But he spoke as one who knew and was interested in the fate of the missing child.

Annie was not deceived; but she was too polite to show that she detected in her visitor the first abductor of little Owlet.

She answered all his questions, and soon convinced him that the child was in safe hands, on her way to Roma Fronde.

Hanson laughed to himself at the cleverness of the little owl, in so adroitly making good her escape, and at her rare good luck in finding a guide to her Lady.

He also congratulated himself on having got entirely rid of his incubus in such a highly satisfactory manner.

He took leave of Annie Moss and went to his hotel.

He paid the policemen as handsomely as if they had brought him the child, instead of having brought him the news of her escape from the city.

Then he paid and discharged the nurse, giving her, in addition to her wages, all the clothing and trinkets left behind by little Owlet: "If she could make use of them," he said.

Oh, yes! she could make use of them. She had a

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little girl of her own at home, left in the care of her sister, and she would be very glad and grateful for the finery. "Her Margery could wear them on the Sunday-school picnics and the steamboat excursions," she explained.

CHAPTER XXV

REBA BUSHE

Hanson moved to a more fashionable hotel, and gave himself up, unrestrainedly, to the pursuit of pleasure, while he waited for the return of his stepmother and sister from Europe.

He felt an unusual longing now for the society of those two women, who, although he seemed to care so little for them, had loved him all their lives and had proved that they did so by every word and act.

This summer, he said to himself, he would turn over a new leaf, so far as these relatives were concerned.

He would go with them, to whatever fashionable resort they might choose to favor. And if it should be at the seaside, he would bring around his new yacht, the "Reba," and place it at the orders of his stepmother and her friends.

"And that will please the old lady mightily," he said. "I have not been half good to the dear old girl, and though she is only the second wife of my stepfather, and not even my stepmother, she has always been awfully fond of me, and she will appreciate any attention I may show her and be especially proud to have the yacht placed at her disposal."

Hanson was beginning to realize a new sensation, a very new sensation—that of thinking of others and of conferring a favor. Even if it were only in anticipation, it pleased his egotism.

He was getting over his mad infatuation for Roma Fronde. He was even now wondering at himself for

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ever having felt so deeply for a woman—for ever having given himself so much trouble to win her.

"The jade was never worth it," he assured himself. And now he never spoke of his discrowned queen except as "that jade," "that minx," "that lunatic."

He really thought her something of a lunatic to have refused such a magnificent specimen of manhood as himself, in favor of a sallow-faced, lantern-jawed, hollow-eyed "cad" who was compelled to earn his living by his labor.

Bah! she was not worth thinking of. He would forget the proud idiot who, he truly hoped and believed, would be brought to the very dust by the beggarly fellow she had preferred to him—as, of course, she would be.

That snob Harcourt was just the sort of a fellow to take to drink and beat his wife. A clerk! Faugh! Of course he would turn out as bad as bad could be. He would punish the minx for the manner in which she had treated him, the admirable William Hanson. Harcourt would avenge Hanson.

Hanson was too weak even in his passions to be revengeful; he could only feel spiteful. He would not have murdered Roma or Harcourt, even if he could have done so with perfect impunity; but he would like to humiliate or see them humiliated.

He might, after he had hopelessly lost Roma, have gone before a magistrate and denounced Harcourt as the murderer of Nathan Yelverton. If he forbore to take this step it was from no good will to either of the pair; but from reasons that will be understood later.

As for him, he would devote himself to the old girl and the young one.

Perhaps he might marry Reba. She was rather a good sort and worshiped him, as of course every man must wish his wife to do. And, then, the old one would like it. And those two sensible women were devoted to him; there was no doubt about it.

Well, there was time enough to think about that.

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He would take a new, discriminating look at Reba when she should return from Europe.

If she should not have gone off in her looks, perhaps he might drop the handkerchief. But he must be cautious. For if he once let it fall she would be sure to pick it up. There could be no doubt about that.

In fact, Hanson had long indulged a secret delusion that Reba Bushe had always been in love with him; for if she had not, why then had she refused so many offers of marriage?

Of course she was dying for him, and always had been. Well, he would reward her devotion—possibly—and make her and the old lady happy.

Why!—really, after all, there was a sort of pleasurable excitement in making other people happy, when these said other people had a proper appreciation of the honor he did them.

While Hanson was still in this self-complacent mood, waiting to amuse himself by patronizing his stepmother and her daughter, the foreign mail came in one morning and brought him a letter with a deep black border on the envelope, postmarked Rome, and directed in his sister's handwriting.

He tore it open in vague anxiety, and in a few, half-legible, tear-blotted lines he read of the death of his stepmother, who had died of Roman fever in the City of the Catacombs.

Hanson was for a moment stunned by the shock of this announcement.

Until this moment he had not realized how much he loved the woman who had been the only mother he ever knew, a most tender and devoted mother, a much too foolishly fond and indulgent mother. His thoughts flew back to the time when he first knew her, he a lonely, motherless baby boy of six springs, wandering companionless about the premises of the summer hotel, until she, the belle of the place, noticed him, pitied him and became his playmate, and how he himself had brought his widowed papa to her, and—unintentionally—made the match between them.

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How tender, sweet and loving she had been to him all her life, even leading her own little daughter to give up to him in everything, "because he was motherless, poor boy"—"motherless," with such a devoted mother as she was.

And how had he repaid her for the wealth of love she had lavished on him? With careless, thoughtless, selfish indifference.

And now she was dead! Dead in her glorious prime! For she was not an old or even an elderly woman, though in his want of reverence he had called her the old girl.

Never before had he realized what death and bereavement by death meant!

And he—William Hanson—half dude, half sportsman, whole egotist, went to his room and locked himself in, feeling quite unfit to meet any of his familiar companions.

He was not only grieved for the loss of his good stepmother, but cruelly disappointed in his plan of devoting himself to her for the season, and so, in a manner making up to her for his long neglect. He was angry, too! What right had death—what right had fate to disappoint him of carrying out his magnificent resolution? To wound him so deeply—to make his heart bleed in this unexpected manner?

Truly, life had gone very bitterly with him during this last year.

First, he had been refused by the only woman he had ever wished to marry.

Then, when he had done, and dared, and sinned, and suffered for her, more than any man had ever done for any woman before, he had hopelessly lost her.

Then he had been shipwrecked, and carried around the world before he could reach home again.

Then he was repulsed with contumely by his beloved.

When he broke the law and risked his liberty for her sake, by carrying off her pet child, he had gained nothing by the desperate move but the burden of a

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sick baby, who proved the greatest nuisance he had ever been called upon to endure.

And now! when he had in a measure got over his infatuation for Roma Fronde, and had got rid of the child, and had made magnanimous resolutions in behalf of his neglected stepmother—death must dart down and snatch her out of his way.

So grieved, disappointed and angry he was that it was some hours before he could summon courage to leave his room and rejoin his companions below stairs.

The next day he went into deep mourning, and inserted the notice of his stepmother's death in all the papers, and received the condolences of every acquaintance who met him.

He wondered what Reba intended to do, and thought of running over to Rome to join her.

But he prudently decided to wait for another letter.

It came in a few days, telling him—what she had not told him in the last letter, whose few lines had been devoted exclusively to the news of her mother's death—that she also had been extremely ill with the same dangerous fever that had bereft them of the dear mother, but that she was then convalescent. She should sail on the "Gen de Mer," from Havre, on the fifteenth, and expected to reach New York on or before the twenty-fifth. She requested him to have their house on Sixty-sixth Street opened and prepared for her reception, and to keep a lookout for news of the steamer, that he might meet her on the pier.

Hanson went immediately and warned the housekeeper and butler who had been left in charge of the premises on Sixty-sixth Street, to engage new servants and have everything prepared for the reception of his sister.

As this was the twentieth, he began to look out for the "Gen de Mer."

On the day of its arrival he went down to the pier and waited for the ship to come in. As soon as it touched the pier and threw off the gang plank he

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went on board, the first of a troop of people going to receive friends.

It took some little time to press through the crowd on deck and reach his sister.

When he found her he was almost too much shocked to be able to greet her.

She stood leaning heavily on the arm of her maid, a strong, middle-aged woman, while behind them came an elderly manservant, loaded with an India shawl, an alligator bag, a parasol, and other personal belongings.

But Reba was so changed as to be scarcely recognizable. Her form was emaciated, her complexion pallid, her cheeks hollow and flushed with two burning fever spots, her eyes preternaturally large and brilliant, but surrounded with livid, blue circles.

Death was on the once lovely face.

Hanson could scarcely forbear an exclamation of grief and dismay.

He took her in his arms and kissed her; then drew her arm through his own, and begged her to lean with all her weight upon him.

"I fear you have been very ill, my dear girl. You were unfit for the voyage. You should have cabled me to come to you," he said, while he supported her until the pressure of the crowd passed, for he knew he could not elbow his way through it with this exhausted woman on his arm, except at the risk of her fainting.

"I was so anxious to get home I could not have waited," she said, with a faint smile; then added: "Our darling mother—her remains lie in the cemetery of St. Maria, just out of Rome. It was by her own desire."

Hanson did not reply to this. Much as he felt interested in the last illness and death of his stepmother, he did not wish to encourage this sinking girl to talk of the depressing subject.

"I think we may move on now," he said. "Lean heavily on my arm, dearest; I have a carriage on the pier quite near. You will not have to walk far."

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They followed in the wake of the crowd that poured over the gang plank, and soon reached the carriage.

Hanson lifted his sister into it. The maid took the shawl, bag, etc., from the manservant, and followed.

"Anthony will see to the baggage, Willie. Come in," said Reba. Hanson gave the coachman the word "Home," and got into the carriage.

They drove off, leaving the manservant to look after the baggage and follow them later.

It was a long drive from the pier to Sixty-sixth Street, but Hanson supported his sister in his arms, and laid her head upon his shoulder.

Hanson might have been a devil, but he was not a devil to her.

When they reached the house, and the gray-haired butler had opened the door, he lifted her carefully from the carriage, and, thinking how light she was, bore her tenderly into the front hall, then into the drawing room, and placed her in the easiest resting-chair.

The housekeeper, a pleasant-faced, elderly woman, came in to welcome her young lady home. She expressed her sorrow in the family bereavement, and her concern in seeing Miss Reba looking "so far from well." But added a hope that it was only the effect of the fever and the sea voyage, and that she would soon "be herself again."

It was now sunset. Dinner was ready to go on the table.

The servants were assiduous in their attention to their returning young lady.

"Perhaps you would like a cup of tea brought to you here, miss, before you go to your room to dress," said Mrs. Riley, thoughtfully, as she took the hat and gloves which Reba drew off and handed her.

"Thank you, yes," said Reba; "you may send it up to me. I shall not want any dinner. Willie, darling," she continued, turning to her brother, "it seems very unkind in me not to join you at the table on this very first evening of my return; but I am not able to

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do so, really. I feel quite worn out, and so you will excuse me, I know."

He saw, indeed, that she was very much exhausted, and he felt distressed at her condition and angry with fate for daring to distress him.

"Do not exert yourself, dearest; you must get to bed as soon as possible. I fear you must have had a rough voyage."

"No, a perfectly lovely one! And it did me good. I am better than when I started, odd as that may seem to you," she said.

And it did seem so odd to Hanson that subsequently he questioned Mrs. Stanley, her maid, who told him that Miss Reba had been taken out of her sick bed and carried on a stretcher on board the steamer.

Mrs. Riley came in with the tea.

Reba drank one cup, and then went upstairs to her room, supported on the arm of her brother, and attended by her devoted maid, who had been with her for some years.

Hanson left her at the door of her chamber and went to his own room to dress for his solitary dinner.

But he went to the table with but little appetite.

The situation was altogether too deeply depressing. His stepmother was dead, his sister was dying—there could be no question of that. The last was as certain as the first.

He was learning now that there was something more in this world of

"Shadow and shine"

than champagne suppers, boon companions, etc., etc.; and he hated the discovery.

The days that followed were sad enough.

Reba failed from day to day.

Yet every morning she arose, insisted on being dressed, and came down to sit in the drawing room to receive the friends who, as soon as they heard of her arrival, flocked every hour to see her, to welcome

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her home, and to condole with her on the death of her mother.

Every evening she was carried fainting to her room.

Her brother expostulated, but she answered:

"I must see all the friends who come while I can do so. There will be time enough to rest—afterward."

She was not deceived as to her condition.

One day she said to her brother:

"Willie, darling, I wish you to bring a lawyer to me to-day."

"A lawyer, Reba! Why, what should you want with a lawyer?"

"To make my will. You are no kin to me, Willie, so, if I should die intestate, you would not get a penny of my property; it would go to strangers."

"Oh, Reba! are you—do you—think you are so ill as all that?" burst from him before he had time to check himself.

She answered, calmly:

"Yes, dear; as ill as all that. I got well of the fever—or I thought I did—but I did not seem to get strong; and now I grow weaker every day. You know, dear, that I inherited pulmonary consumption from poor papa. I think the germs of that disease have been lurking in my system for some years, and the deadly fever developed them. I may be wrong, but this is my theory."

She spoke so quietly, without the slightest sign of any emotion, that Hanson was as much surprised as grieved.

"Let me call in a physician, Reba," he pleaded.

"Certainly, if you like. A skillful physician may palliate symptoms, and even prolong life, though he cannot cure," she replied.

The best medical skill and science in the city were called in; but, as might be expected, in vain.

Hanson, poor wretch! had now something else to think of besides his insignificant self.

His stepmother—the only mother he had ever known, the devoted mother—was dead in her hand-

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some, happy, middle age. His stepsister—the only sister he had ever known, the only relative he had in the world—in her blooming youth lay at the point of death.

Why, how uncertain were all earthly relations and possessions! The crust of the world was but skin deep. Anybody or anything might fall through and be swallowed up at any time.

Until this time, he had never known how heavily he had leaned on those two women, who seemed coeval with his own existence.

Though he had chosen, after his majority, to live apart from them, yet he always knew where to find them when he needed them, and was equally sure of a warm welcome when he sought them.

And now, just when he had awakened to a sense of his indebtedness and responsibility to them, and had resolved to set about immediately to make amends, to have them both ruthlessly snatched from him by death, why, it grieved, disappointed and enraged him.

The dying girl saw something of his mental disturbance without being able to analyze it, and therefore not being able to understand it—quite.

"Why do you take this so very much to heart, dearest?" she asked, one day, while he sat beside her easy-chair in the drawing room, where she persisted in remaining during the day.

"Oh, Reba!" was all that he could answer, and that with a groan.

"It is not hard to die, Willie. It is easy and natural. So easy and natural."

"Oh, Reba! Dear Reba! You are not going to die," he said, though he knew he was speaking falsely.

"Oh, yes, I am, dear Willie. Let us not deceive ourselves or each other with false hopes. And why should I not die?"

"Oh, Reba, you are so young, so young!" groaned Hanson.

"That is no reason. Babies die, little girls and boys die, young men and maidens die, as well as old

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men and women. Death is no respector of youth or age, of times or seasons. It is so common that it must be kindly. Our Heavenly Father would never let innocent babies, little children and young people and people in the prime of life die if death were not good and gracious."

"And you are not unwilling, Reba?"

"Unwilling? No. No more unwilling to die than to go to sleep. If I die young, I shall take my youth with me into my Father's house."

"And you do not care at all for leaving me?" sadly inquired the egotist.

"Yes, Willie, I do care very much for leaving you, dearest. But I think when the Lord calls anyone to Himself, it must be for the good of all—not only for the good of the one that goes, but for the good of all who are left behind. My departure will be for your good, dearest, as well as for mine. We who sink into the brief sleep of death in this world will presently wake in our Father's kingdom. But you know this as well as I do, Willie, so it seems like uttering a mere platitude, though it be a divine truth."

Hanson was moved as he had never been in all his life before.

He sank down on his knees beside her and bowed his face on the arm of her chair. She bent her head to him and kissed the flaxen curls that she had loved to caress from their childhood up.

But he could not be reconciled to the inevitable, and would not permit his sorrow to be comforted, or his anger to be appeased.

One afternoon, about a week from this time, when he came into the drawing room, he found his sister alone and looking so grave and so troubled that he instantly knew something unusual and disastrous had happened.

"What is the matter, Reba, dearest?" he tenderly inquired.

"Draw up a chair, William, and sit down by me—close by me, for I have something very serious and

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important to say to you, and—my voice is not strong to-day."

"Not strong!" No, indeed! It was so weak and faint that she scarcely spoke above her breath.

Somewhat alarmed by the solemnity of her words, he took a chair, drew it to her side, and seated himself.

"William," she began, "a few days ago, a lady friend from Washington, who happened to be here for a few days on her way to Newport, called to see me, and informed me of what she called a false, malicious, injurious report, concerning you, that had been set afloat in Washington, and that, she said, should be met and put down by the parties interested. It was not such a report, she said, that might be treated with silent contempt, and allowed to die; if it had been, she said that she would not have troubled me with it. It must be met and crushed."

Reba paused to recover her failing breath.

Hanson, very much agitated by many causes, handed her the tiny glass of Benedictine that stood on a little stand near by, and inquired, in trembling accents:

"What was the nature of this rumor?"

"It seemed so absurd at first that I thought it quite beneath our notice. But when my friend enlarged upon the subject, and gave many details, I changed my mind, and determined as the first step, and before troubling you, to write to my dear Roma for a refutation of the slander—for she was as much implicated in the report as yourself. I wrote to her five days ago. Here is her answer. It must have been delayed in the mail, for the same post brought me a local paper, with an account of the arrest of William Harcourt for the murder of Nathan Yelverton!"

Hanson started, and turned as white as a sheet.

"Take the letter away with you, William. Read it alone in your room. Then, if you like, come to me. I love you, and grieve for you."

And the sinking girl handed to her brother Roma Fronde's letter, containing the full statement of the

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fraud that had been practiced upon her by William Hanson at the marriage ceremony in the church at South Washington.

Aghast, he took the letter, reeled out of the room to the library, and dropped into an armchair. He knew well what that letter had revealed to his sister. Yet he read it, and never before had he realized the utter baseness of his act.

After an hour he re-entered his sister's presence, pale, trembling, crestfallen, humiliated.

She looked at him and pitied him.

He silently placed the letter in her wasted hand.

"Sit down by me and tell me, Willie. Is it true?" she inquired.

He did not sit down, but he dropped on the carpet beside her chair, laid his head on the arm, and murmured:

"It is true. But I was mad—mad."

She entreated him to rise and sit beside her; and when he had done so, she drew from him the whole story—much more than Roma Fronde had told or had known at that time, for he explained the means by which he had gained the control of William Harcourt's fate.

Reba did not reproach him in words; she controlled her tongue. But she could not control the expression of her countenance, which too clearly revealed the horror she felt at his act.

"And now, what can I do?" he groaned, in remorse and despair.

"You can make atonement. Harcourt and Roma are both in deep trouble now. Harcourt will soon be put on trial for his life. Go and do all you can to save him," she solemnly replied.

"I cannot leave you, Reba."

"But you must," she said.

And she had her will.

And that is how William Hanson appeared on the stand as a witness in the defense of William Harcourt.

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CHAPTER XXVI

WHAT HANSON REALLY DID SEE OF IT

THE appearance of William Hanson on the stand as a witness for the defense was a great surprise to Harcourt and to Roma.

They exchanged glances of amazement and inquiry.

As soon as Harcourt had recovered from his astonishment, he drew out tablets and pencil from his pocket, wrote a few hasty lines, tore off the leaf, and passed it to Mr. Merritt, to be passed on to Miss Fronde.

Roma took it, and read:

"He was a hidden witness of the tragedy, you will remember, and saw and knows that it was an accident. No doubt that late remorse has brought him here. Seeing that I stand indicted for willful murder, he knows that his testimony will change the verdict to manslaughter. That is all he can do for me. I am glad that he has come to make this partial atonement—glad that he is not so utterly evil as I have lately supposed him to be."

She nodded assent to the inquiring look of her lover.

Harcourt had written that Hanson's testimony would change the verdict from willful murder to manslaughter, which was all that the witness could do for him.

But Harcourt was, in his ignorance of some facts, widely mistaken. Hanson's testimony would do much more than that for the prisoner, as will soon be seen.

Meanwhile William Hanson had been sworn in the usual form, and now, in reply to questions put by Counselor Hiram Keneage, he stated that his name, in full, was William Vanderhoeffn Hanson. He was twenty-eight years of age, resident in New York City,

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had neither trade, business nor profession; lived on his private fortune, inherited from his father.

"Witness, look at the prisoner at the bar," said Counselor Keneage.

Hanson turned, and met the eyes of Will Harcourt fixed on him; then turned to face the bench once more.

"Do you know the prisoner at the bar?"

"I know him perfectly well. He is William Harcourt, once clerk at the Crest House, Isle of Storms."

"When and where did you first make his acquaintance?"

"In the September of 187—, at the Crest House."

"Do you know anything about his—the prisoner's—connection with the death of one Nathan Yelverton, a guest at the Crest House, on the night of the fifteenth of September, 187—?"

"Much more than the prisoner himself does, I fancy," was the strange reply.

Harcourt started and looked up. Hanson met the look and smiled—a queer smile.

"You say that you know more of the circumstances of the death of Yelverton than does the prisoner at the bar?"

"I say I fancy I do."

"Explain yourself, witness."

"I wish nothing more than to do so. To begin, then, I say that the prisoner at the bar, William Harcourt, had so little to do with the murder of Nathan Yelverton, or with the death of Nathan Yelverton, that if William Harcourt had been a thousand miles from the scene of the tragedy, Nathan Yelverton would have been shot dead at that hour of that night as he was."

Here a great sensation thrilled the crowded court-room. Harcourt started, paled, and flushed, and listened with suspended breath.

Roma sought his eyes, and exchanged glances with him.

His look only expressed total ignorance and unsuspicion of what revelations might be about to be

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made, and intense anxiety to hear more. The excited spectators once more rose on tiptoes, craned their necks and strained their eyes, to watch and hear the witness.

"Do you mean to tell this court that the death of Yelverton was a suicide?" was the next question.

"By no means. Not at all. It was a cold-blooded murder—an assassination."

A thrill of horror shook the crowd of spectators. Harcourt, Roma and the counsel for the prisoner listened with suspended breath.

"You say, on your oath, that the death of Nathan Yelverton was a murder—an assassination?"

"I do, emphatically."

"Who, then, was the murderer—the assassin?"

"That I do not know."

"Was it the prisoner at the bar?"

"It certainly was not."

"You repeat that Yelverton was murdered, and not by the prisoner; yet it is in evidence that Yelverton came to his death by a bullet fired from a pistol held in his hand, and forcibly turned toward him by William Harcourt in a struggle for the possession of the weapon."

"Yes, it is in evidence that the deceased came to his death in that manner. Even the prisoner at the bar confessed and believes that he did so. And yet, now in the face of all evidence—in the face of all appearances—I declare, on my oath, remember, that Nathan Yelverton was not killed by a bullet shot from the pistol he held in his hand at the moment he received the mortal wound of which he instantly died," said Hanson, solemnly.

"Witness, how can you know that? Upon what circumstances do you found your singular statement?"

"Upon facts personally and positively known to myself."

"What were these facts?"

"That Nathan Yelverton's pistol was loaded with

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blank cartridges only, and had not a single bullet in it at the time of the fatal shooting."

"Witness, you are making some very startling statements. Be more explicit, if you please, and tell the court how these facts came to your knowledge."

Another great sensation in court.

"I do declare," said one old lady to another, "the answers of this witness are like successive shocks from an electric machine. I wonder what is coming next?"

Harcourt was, of course, more affected, more amazed, than anyone in the room. He bent forward to listen intently, so that no word of the impending explanation should escape him.

"If the honorable court will permit me," said Hanson, with a bow to the bench, "I would like to tell the tale in my own way, subject to correction, if, in my experience, I should in any manner transgress the laws that govern evidence."

"Proceed, witness," said Judge Barbour, speaking for the first time.

"I will first explain how I came to know that Mr. Yelverton's pistol was loaded with blank cartridges only.

"That afternoon of the fifteenth of September, 187—, there was a shooting party on the plateau in front of the hotel.

"The party consisted of Yelverton, myself and four other guests of the house.

"We were shooting with pistols at a target.

"Yelverton was a crack shot, and carried off most of the honors.

"We kept up the sport until sunset.

"Yelverton was the victor.

"All the men left the ground except Yelverton and myself.

"We walked down to the beach. Yelverton was examining his pistol, and then his pockets and cases. Presently he exclaimed:

"'By Jove! I haven't a charge left.' And, with a laugh, he added: 'If a band of burglars were to get

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into my room to-night, I should have nothing to defend myself with at all. Lend me half a dozen bullets, old man.'

"I had not one left. In fact, my stock had been exhausted before his own, and I told him so.

"'Never mind,' he said, with another laugh; 'I will load up with blank cartridges; that will do to scare off an intruder for one night. To-morrow I will go to Snowden and lay in a good supply; matter of habit, old boy; haven't slept without a loaded pistol under my head for a score of years.'

"While we sat on the beach he loaded his pistol with blank cartridges.

"Then we strolled on, and extended our walk as far as the 'Rattles' at the north end of the island, and came back on the other side.

"It was so late when we reached the house that supper was over.

"But we two had ours served at a little table, 'tete-a-tete.' We lingered over it.

"And when, at length, we left the table, we went into the ladies' parlor and listened to some music.

"Finally, after most of the ladies had retired, we went into the men's parlor, where we found all the card tables full.

"Then we passed on to the office of the hotel, where some men were lounging, and where young Harcourt stood behind the rails at the desk.

"I joined a quiet party who were playing three-handed whist, with a dummy for the fourth.

"I took dummy's place. Yelverton looked on a little contemptuously, for he scorned such slow games.

"Then an unexpected guest came in, one Charles Cutts, a Baltimore broker, as I afterward learned, landed from a yacht, hours after our ferryboat had ceased running.

"This man deposited a large sum of money in Harcourt's hands to be locked up in the office safe, took a receipt, and then went off to the room that had been assigned to him.

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"Yelverton challenged young Harcourt to play.

"And they sat down to a table and commenced the game. Harcourt had not stopped to lock up Cutts' money, but had thrust it into his pocket.

"I saw him do it.

"I suspected that the gambler had designs to win that money.

"He ordered champagne.

"They played on.

"I watched them as well as I could while attending to my own game at another table.

"But I played so badly that at the end of the rubber, which our antagonists had won, my partner declined to play any more, and the party was broken up."

"Are all these details necessary?" the judge inquired.

"I think your honor would say so," replied the witness, bowing as formally as if he had been in a drawing room instead of a courtroom.

"Proceed."

And he went on.

"Our card party broke up, and the three men who had sat down with me slipped away one by one.

"I remained to watch the players at the other table.

"They were both so much absorbed that they did not seem to notice my presence.

"I watched them until I saw Harcourt fall more and more under the spell of the stronger nature that dominated him; drink more and more; play deeper and deeper; at length lose his self-control and his reason to such a degree that he staked the money that was not his own, and—lost it."

At this juncture poor Will Harcourt flushed crimson, and he buried his face in his hands.

The witness continued:

"I had seen enough, in seeing just what I had expected—the stranger's money staked and lost."

A low, irrepressible groan escaped from the burdened breast of Harcourt.

The witness continued:

"I slipped away unperceived, leaving the two still at

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the table—Yelverton triumphant, Harcourt despondent.

"When I reached my room, I found my window open and the place flooded with moonlight.

"I went to close my window shutters, which opened upon the roof of a piazza, which was about two feet below the window sill.

"As I leaned out, I saw a man sitting on the roof just under the window of Yelverton's room, which was next my own.

" 'What are you doing there?' I inquired.

" 'Taking the air, and enjoying the prospect of the moonlight on the sea,' he answered. 'My room is the seventh on this line, and I just let myself out of my window,' he added.

" 'Ah!' I said. 'Good night.'

"And I closed my shutters and thought no more of the matter, except to come to the conclusion that the man was one of the recent guests and a stranger to me.

"I went to bed and soon heard Yelverton come into his room, which was the corner one, next mine, as I have explained.

"The partitions are very thin.

"I heard Yelverton mutter:

" 'D——n it, this is the first night in twenty years that I have gone to rest unarmed.'

"And then I heard him tumble into bed.

"I had closed my shutters and put out my light, but I was kept awake by a trifling, though sufficient, cause.

"There was a knot hole in the plank partition between my room and the gambler's.

"This hole was in a line between Yelverton's east window, through which the harvest moon was pouring a flood of light, which pierced through the hole in the wall and flashed across in the face of a looking-glass opposite my bed, whose side was against the partition wall.

"This light so flashed in my eyes that I could not sleep, and so at length I stood up to stop the hole with the toe of a sock.

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"As I looked through the knot hole, my hand was arrested by the sight I saw—myself unseen.

"There were Harcourt and Yelverton in a silent, deadly struggle for the possession of a pistol.

"And there at the lighted window was the figure of the man I had seen.

"I got but a glimpse of him, but in that glimpse I saw that he held a pistol, aimed at Yelverton or Harcourt—I could not tell which; but these latter in their struggle changed positions so often that it would have been difficult to pick off the right one if the waylaying assassin wished to shoot either."

"Why did you not give the alarm?" was the next pertinent question put the witness.

"Because I had not an instant of time.

"The tragic drama was enacted in a flash. In the twinkling of an eye.

"Simultaneously with my first amazed sight of the scene came the report of the pistol, fired from the window, and the fall of Yelverton, his own pistol going off as he dropped."

"Why did you not then rouse the house?"

"The house was roused by the report of the two pistols, which seemed to be merged into one, and crowds were hurrying to the scene before I had recovered the use of my faculties.

"It is no trifle to see a murder committed.

"For a few minutes I was so panic-stricken with consternation that I could not move or withdraw my eye from my point of view.

"I was watching Harcourt, too. I knew by what I saw that he, in his intense excitement, knew nothing of the pistol fired from the window, but believed that Yelverton had been killed by the pistol held in his own hand, for which they were struggling when it went off.

"I saw his horror and despair, his rapid, instinctive preparations for escaping and covering his tracks.

"He had but barely fled through the window and clapped the shutters to and let himself drop to the

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shed when the crowd reached the door of the room and began to call and rap."

"Why did you not give this evidence before the coroner's jury?" was the next question.

"Because I was not summoned. I went off the next morning in the early boat that was sent for the coroner, and kept out of the way until the inquest was over."

"Why did you avoid a subpœna?"

"Because I did not wish to appear as a witness for the prosecution on a murder trial. I object to capital punishment so much that I will never help to hang a man if I can possibly avoid it."

"Have you any suspicion as to the identity of the assassin who waylaid and murdered Nathan Yelverton?"

"Yes, I have a suspicion, but only a suspicion. And as the man I suspect, and only suspect, is not on trial for his life, I prefer not to mention his name."

The point was not pressed.

But Hanson was taken in hand by the State's attorney and put through a very severe cross-examination, which, however, only elicited details which strengthened his testimony. At length Hanson was permitted to step down.

Counselor Hiram Keneage met him in his descent and congratulated him on the manner in which he had more than baffled, routed and prostrated Dent.

Then Hanson bowed to the bench, the counsel, the prisoner and his friends and passed down to the rear of the crowd or out of the courtroom, no one could tell where.

Harcourt exchanged glances with Roma, grave, solemn, thankful, unutterable emotions.

Counselor Keneage was about to call another witness to the stand, but it was now late, and it was well known that Judge Barbour never had been in the habit of sacrificing personal ease to official duty by any works of supererogation.

He adjourned the court until ten o'clock the next morning.

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The spectators poured out of the room.

Roma and her two old friends lingered to speak to Harcourt.

The bailiff took the whole party into the sheriff's room for an interview.

"Oh, my beloved!" whispered Harcourt as soon as he could speak aside to Roma—"I feel as though I were born again—born into some new world of light and life and peace! Oh! to have this burden of blood-guiltiness lifted as by a miracle from my soul! It is a foretaste of heaven, Roma!"

"It is! Oh, it is! I am with you in your new world of life and light and peace, my Will!" she responded warmly.

"There can be no doubt of his acquittal now," said Counselor Keneage to Lawyer Merritt.

"No! the case might have been given to the jury this afternoon. They would have returned a verdict of acquittal before leaving their box."

"Yes, but old Barbour is the slowest coach in the country. His deliberateness is perfectly maddening sometimes."

"Who is this new witness you have to produce, Mr. Keneage?" inquired Harcourt.

"One Charles Cutts."

"Charles Cutts!" exclaimed Harcourt in strong emotion.

"Yes, we have heard his name more than once in the course of the day. Why should you be so very much surprised?"

"I am not surprised. I am—I am—shocked and curious! He has told me, more than once, in our casual meetings, that he knew all about the death of Yelverton, but would never give information unless it was to save the life of an innocent man who might be tried for the murder. I always thought that, in such an event, he meant to denounce me."

"Did you know him well?" inquired Mr. Keneage.

"No, I only met him him twice at the Crest House. The night of his arrival and the morning of his departure. And three times since casually."

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"He evidently can tell who fired that fatal shot," said Mr. Merritt.

"I have known him for a long time. He is a fellow townsman of mine—a most unfortunate man, a little off his head, I think; but not too much so to give evidence in court."

"He is very rich. In what respect has he been so unfortunate?" inquired Mr. Merritt.

"I would rather not say just now. You will hear something about it to-morrow when he is on the witness stand, I fancy. Now, I must bid you good evening, my friends. I have letters to write," said Mr. Keneage, and, with a circular, sweeping bow that included all the company, he left the room.

"I think I must follow Mr. Keneage's example, dear Roma," whispered Harcourt. "We must not trespass on the kindness of our friends." And then he turned to the patient constable who had him in charge and said: "I am ready to go."

The friends left the courthouse together and took leave of each other on the sidewalk, from which, fortunately, all the loungers had dispersed.

Harcourt went westward with the constable and Roma eastward with her two friends.

The latter group reached the depot in good time, and had but a few minutes to wait before the train started.

On reaching Snowden, they hired a boat, with two stout oarsmen, to take them across to the Isle of Storms.

They reached it at about dark.

Faithful little Owlet, with Titus for bodyguard, awaited her Lady on the beach, seized her hand, kissed her rapturously and clung to her as they climbed the cliff.

"How is Mr. William, Lady? When will he come home to us? Does he think it unkind of me not to go to see him? I hope you splained to him how it was," she prattled on as soon as she had recovered her breath on reaching the plateau.

"Mr. Harcourt is well, my dear. He will soon be

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free. To-morrow, I hope. He understands perfectly why you do not come to the courthouse, and he sends his love to you," Roma said.

'Rusalem, "clothed and in his right mind," was waiting on the front stoop.

He took off his hat, made a low bow and said:

"Yo' look so happy, youn' mist'ess, as I reckon yo's got good news."

"Yes, good news, Jerusalem! Mr. Harcourt will be free to-morrow, I am sure! Free and completely vindicated," replied the lady as she entered the house.

The party had just time to wash their faces before the dinner bell rang.

After dinner the two gentlemen sat on the front stoop, smoking their pipes and gazing out to sea.

Roma went the round of the little sanitarium and found all well under the supervision of Annie.

And after that she had a quiet hour in her sitting room with Titus and Owlet.

Titus had a double slate full of sums to show her and was pleased to find that they met the approval of his benefactress.

Then he exhibited his copy book, with the round-hand copy strip really reproduced all the way down the page.

Finally he said his spelling lesson and read a page from his First Reader.

Roma praised his diligence and gave him leave to go to the fishing landing for an hour to help old Mr. McMasters.

When Roma and Owlet were left alone the child drew a hassock to the side of her Lady, and, taking her hand to fondle, inquired gravely:

"Lady, is it quite true?"

"What true, my dear?"

"About our Saviour being wrapped in swaddling bands and laid in a manger."

"Yes, dear, quite true. Don't you remember, last Christmas, I read the story to you?"

"Yes, but, you see, I was thinking so much about

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Santa Claus and things that I don't pay much 'tention."

"What brought it to your mind now?"

"Mrs. Annie was telling me and little Charlie Simmons and Mamie Grey all about it," explained the child, naming the eldest two of the children in the house.

"It was all true, dear."

" 'Wrapped in swaddling clothes, and laid in a manger, because there was no room in the inn?' Oh, yes! of course I know it was true, because it is in the New Testament; and as true as I stand here!" said Owlet, with the most solemn emphasis, and crossing her hands on her bosom—"as true as I stand here, when I heard that read out of the Bible, I felt sorry and ashamed of my fine, white nightgowns, and nice bed, with sheets smelling of lavender."

"Many Christians in the first countries after the coming of the Lord felt like that, dear. But still there is no harm in enjoying the good things he gives us, if we don't forget the poor," said Roma.

"Yes, I suppose it is so. And, Lady, He really lived with his father and mother and minded them like any other boy?"

"Yes, dear."

"And helped his poor father to work at the carpenter's bench?"

"Yes, Owlet."

"Oh! how can anybody look down on work, and be ashamed of work, when our Lord worked at a bench? And, oh, Lady! Lady! how can anybody be proud of their fine clothes, and fine houses, and put on airs, when our Lord was wrapped in swaddling clothes, and laid in a manger? How can they, Lady?"

"Because they are insane, dear. Pride and idleness are insanity, though they are not called so."

"That means they are not possessed of common sense."

"Exactly."

"I thought so, but I didn't say it. I have about

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given up saying that now, because Mrs. Annie says I am like the old man of Cordova."

"Who was he, dear?"

"Don't you know? Well, neither did I until Mrs. Annie told me; and I don't want to be like him."

"Who was he? Tell me about him," said Roma.

"'There was an old man of Cordova,
Who said one thing over and over,
Till the people cried: "Do,
Please, say something new,
You dreary old man of Gordova.'"

"And you think you are like the old man of Cordova?"

"I know I am, but I'll try to mend my ways."

Soon after this the two gentlemen, having smoked out their pipes, strolled in from the porch, and the conversation became general.

Titus returned punctually.

And then, everyone feeling fatigued, the party separated and retired to rest.

Before Roma got into bed, however, she obeyed an irresistible impulse, drew on her silent slippers, took a taper and went upstairs to view the babies in their cots.

She entered the dimly lighted rooms so noiselessly as not to waken either nurses or babies.

She set her taper on a little stand and then went her rounds of all the little cots in both rooms.

As she looked on the little infants which were only a few days ago "so pale and wan," and were now so round and rosy, her bosom swelled with delight and gratitude that she had the means of saving these innocents.

"And to think I once dreamed of using this place as the scene of a proud hospitality to those who did not need it! But then, as my little owl would say, 'I was not possessed of common sense.'"

Roma went back to bed very happy.

The favorable turn affairs had taken for Harcourt,

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leading almost to the certainty of his acquittal, so tranquillized the mind of Roma that she enjoyed the first night's sleep she had known since the hour in which she heard of his self-surrender, self-accusation and committal to prison.

CHAPTER XXVII.

WHO FIRED THE FATAL SHOT?

EARLY the next morning Roma and her two knights took the boat, rowed by Titus and Tom, and went over to Snowden.

They sent the boat back by the boys and walked on to the railway depot, where they caught the train to Cecilton.

The cars were crowded with people on their way to the county town to attend the trail, and the conversation was all upon the subject of the last witness who had testified on the day previous.

When they reached Cecilton they left the train, followed by a great crowd, and took the road to the courthouse, still accompanied by the crowd, who were bound to the same point with themselves.

When they reached the courtroom, they found the place packed, as on the preceding days.

Jurors, counsel, reporters, prisoner were all in their places, only waiting for the judge.

Roma went to the side of Harcourt and spoke to him before she took the chair that had been kept for her.

She was struck with the change that had come over Harcourt within the last few hours, yet she did not wonder at it.

"I am so happy to see you looking happy," she whispered.

"Ah! dearest, it is not that I shall be relieved of the penalty, but that I shall be as free from the reality

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as I was from the imagining of blood-guiltiness," he said, pressing the hand she had given him.

"I know it, Will. I understand it perfectly, dear; and I feel for you in this matter as you feel for yourself."

The entrance of the judge put a stop to this short interview, and Roma resumed her seat.

A few minutes given to some slight formalities of routine and then the name of Charles Cutts was called.

And the Baltimore broker took the stand.

Again every individual in that packed courtroom rose upon tiptoes and craned neck and strained eyes and ears to see and hear the new witness.

They caught a glimpse of a short, stout man, with a bald crown and a fringe of iron-gray hair around his head.

And then they had to sink down again, since human nature cannot long endure an overstrained position.

Being duly sworn and questioned, the witness testified that his name was Charles Cutts; his age seventy years; his native place and present home Baltimore; his business that of a broker.

"Look upon the prisoner at the bar," said the examining attorney.

"I see him," replied the witness.

"Do you know the prisoner at the bar?"

"Slightly. He was clerk at the Crest House. His name is William Harcourt. I know that much of him."

"Where were you on the night of the fifteenth of September, 187-?"

"At the Crest House, Isle of Storms."

"Do you know anything about the death of Nathan Yelverton, a guest of the Crest House, who was found dead in his bed, shot through the head, on the night of the fifteenth of September, 187-?"

"I know all about it. I came here voluntarily to tell you all about it."

"Proceed, then."

"I was Nathan Yelverton's executioner."

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Sensation on the bench, in the jury box, at the counsel table and among the spectators.

"What do you mean, witnes, by saying that you were Nathan Yelverton's executioner?"

"I executed Nathan Yelverton for the crimes he had committed against me and mine and others. His death was not a suicide, as the coroner's jury brought it in to be. Nor was it a murder, as the present trial would make it out to be. It was a judicial execution, and I was the executioner. I was more than that. I was the judge, the jury and the prosecutor. I tried, condemned and executed him. I saved many a mother's son, many a wife's husband and many a child's father from ruin by removing him, Nathan Yelverton. The State is indebted to me for the speedy and economical disposition of a great criminal."

"Will you tell the jury how you came to constitute yourself judge, jury and executioner in this remarkable case?"

"Yes."

Here the witness paused in great distress, and even when he resumed, his narrative was often broken by emotion.

"Yes. I had an only daughter, the only child of my beloved young wife, who died to give her life—my Annabel! She was all I had to live for in this world. I loved her doubly, for her own and for her mother's sake. I never sent her away from me to school, but had a governess in the house and visiting masters to give her lessons in languages and fine arts.

"When she was but fifteen years of age—and young as she was, betrothed to a worthy young medical student— business called me to St. Petersburg. I was absent some months, but as I received letters from my darling by every mail I was not uneasy.

"I came home at the end of six months to find my daughter gone, her governess away and my home desolate."

Here the emotion of the witness grew so strong as to interrupt the course of his testimony. After some minutes of struggle for composure, he resumed:

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"I soon found out the secret of her disappearance.

"She had been lured from her home by the miscreant, Nathan Yelverton—a man who had received my hospitality for months at a time—a man who had shared my purse—a man old enough to be my Annabel's father, yet who retained the beauty and fascinations of youth, combined with the infernal arts of unprincipled middle age. He had wiled the young bird from her nest."

Again the witness was overcome for a few minutes and then continued:

"I put the most skillful and experienced detectives on his track and learned these facts: That he had lured her from her home about three months after I had left for Europe, that he had taken her to New York, where he led her into a life more riotous than respectable.

"The letters I had subsequently received from her were written, apparently, by her, and mailed from Baltimore, to put me off my guard.

"How the man ever induced my child to leave her home, so to deceive me, if the letters were written by her, is beyond my comprehension."

Again the witness broke down, but again recovered himself and continued:

"I went to New York, but could find no trace of either the destroyer or his victim. They had both disappeared. At length, after weeks of search and inquiry, I heard that they had gone to Europe to make a tour of the Eastern Continent.

"And I went back to Baltimore, a heartbroken man.

"Some months afterward I received a telegram from Allan McArthur, the young medical student, a native of Maryland, who had been betrothed to my dear Annabel, young as she was, but who was then studying medicine at the New York College of Physicians and Surgeons.

"His telegram told me that Annabel's fate had been ascertained, and begged me to come on at once.

"I was glad and sorry, relieved and perplexed, and,

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through all, much annoyed at the vagueness of the telegram.

"I started by the next train and reached New York in six hours.

"I went directly to the address of my once intended son-in-law to ascertain the fate of my child.

"Your honor and gentlemen, what do you suppose was the fate of my young daughter?

"It was to be cast off by her betrayer and left to starve, to sin or to drown herself.

"She chose to starve.

"She was dying in a cellar, alone and uncared for, when she was found by the police and taken to a pauper hospital.

"She died in a pauper hospital.

"Her body, unclaimed, was sent to the dissecting room of the medical college.

"There Allan McArthur, the medical student, found and recognized it.

"He telegraphed to me, as I said, and when I saw him he gave me the facts.

"But the nervous shock had been too great for him, and he was ill in bed. Think what it must have been to that young man to go into the dissecting room that night, in the way of his usual anatomical studies, where several subjects lay on separate tables waiting for the dissecting knife, and on turning down the white cloth that covered one of them—a slight female form—recognized the face of his love, the girl who had been engaged to him, the girl who had been stolen from him! Your honor and gentlemen, he died of brain fever—another victim of the fiend whose earthly career in crime my bullet arrested.

"I was too late to see the body of my child. The mutilated remains had been laid in a pauper's grave in potter's field. Think of it!—the idolized daughter, the tenderly reared girl, to be lured to such a fate!—a ruined name, a broken heart! the squalid cellar home! the pauper's death in the hospital! the pauper's place in the dissecting room! the pauper's grave in potter's field!

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"And the destroyer, the cause of all this ruin, still infesting the earth!

"Do you wonder that I tried, convicted and sentenced him to death, and only waited my opportunity to execute the sentence? I hunted him all over the world in vain for years.

"He contrived always to elude me, until at length accident placed him in my power.

"Last September I left Baltimore to take a little excursion on the yacht of one of my old friends.

"On the evening of the fifteenth of September we were approaching the Isle of Storms, when some one mentioned Yelverton's name, adding that the sharper had found in that comparatively new and popular summer resort 'fresh fields and pastures green' for his nefarious practices.

"I questioned the speaker and ascertained that Nathan Yelverton was summering at the Crest House.

"When we drew near, though it was getting late, I expressed a wish to be put ashore on the Isle of Storms.

"My friend, the owner of the yacht, promptly complied with my request.

"The anchor was dropped, a boat was lowered, and I was rowed off to the island.

"I went up to the Crest House, entered the office, and found the business of the day apparently over and several men engaged in playing cards. At one of the tables sat the arch fiend. I affected not to see him.

"The youth who was seated with him proved to be young Harcourt, the hotel clerk, for he got up, went behind the rails and gave me the book in which to register my name.

"I left a sum of money to be put in the office safe and took his receipt.

"Then I followed the porter to the room assigned to me.

"He took me up to Room 19, in the Eastern Annex.

"I gave the man a greenback, drew him into conversation and ascertained from him that my sentenced

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convict, Yelverton, occupied Room 25 at the end of the same corridor and on the same side with my own.

"When the porter had left me, I went downstairs, out of the house and around until I stood outside the office window.

"The shutters were closed, but the slats were open, and through those slats, myself unseen, I could see all that went on in that office.

"I saw the devilish arts by which he lured his victim on to ruin.

"I knew perfectly well that his aim was the sum of money intrusted by me to Harcourt.

"And here I would like to say that, knowing his infernal subtlety, I never would have brought his victim into trouble for the loss of that money.

"I left the gambler still at his fiendish work and went upstairs to lie in wait for him.

"I got through my own window, let myself down on the shed, and walked along until I reached the corner room—the gambler's room—where I sat down under his window, which was open. I waited there until I heard some one come into the next room, and then lean out of the window to close the shutters.

"He asked me what I was doing there.

"I answered that I was taking the air and viewing the scene, as my room opened upon that shed.

"He closed the shutters of his chamber, and I saw no more of him.

"Half an hour later Yelverton came up to his room, and very soon tumbled into bed.

"He had left the window of his room open. That was not singular. Many of the windows in that row were open, mine among the rest.

"I watched and waited until every one was apparently asleep.

"I rose and peeped through the window, and then I saw a spectacle that started every nerve, vein and artery in my body to throbbing.

"Young Harcourt had silently entered the room and was engaged in a grim, mute, deadly struggle with the

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gambler for the possession of a pistol with which Yelverton was evidently trying to shoot him.

"I understood in an instant. I knew that he had swindled his young victim out of all the money in his possession, and the poor youth had come to the room to recover what was neither his own nor the gambler's, so as to restore it to me the next morning.

"Yelverton's hour had come. I raised my pistol, took deliberate aim, drew the trigger, and sent the bullet through his brain. He fell, and his own pistol went off in the same instant, leading every one—young Harcourt with the rest—to believe that the fatal shot had been fired from the weapon held in his own hand.

"After the execution I dropped immediately from the window, walked along the shed and re-entered my own room.

"My ruined child was avenged!

"It was a judicial execution! Who but the wronged, outraged, heartbroken father had the first right to try, convict, sentence and execute the destroyer of his child and of his home?

"I am not insane, your honor and gentlemen. Never for an instant in all my troubles have I been insane.

"I did that deed!

"I would do it over again if necessary!

"There is not a man who lives who would not do as I have done.

"I may be brought to trial for this, but there is not a jury in the country who would convict me. And the reason why I did not give myself up was not that I feared a trial by my fellow men, but because I was tired, weary and did not want to be worried.

"I should not have come forward now if it were not to save an innocent man.

"Your honor and gentlemen, I have said all that I have to say, but I am ready and willing to answer any questions that may be put to me."

The sensation in the courtroom was intense, and none felt it more than Harcourt.

He was filled with profound compassion for this unhappy man and bereaved father.

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He now understood all the mysterious hints given him by Charles Cutts whenever they happened to meet.

"I would like to put a few inquiries to the witness," said State's Attorney Dent, rising.

And he began a severe fire of cross-examination, which the witness stood without blenching.

It was a formula without results.

When, at length, the witness was allowed to retire, Counselor Keneage arose and said:

"Your honor, we are quite willing to rest the defense here, and let the case go to the jury without another word from our side."

"So be it, then," said the judge. "The case is now so plain that 'he who runs may read the truth.' It needs no exposition from the bench."

And the bailiff would then have led off the jury to their room, but that the foreman arose and said:

"May it please the court, we have consulted and agreed upon our verdict."

"How do you find, then, gentlemen? Is the prisoner at the bar guilty or not guilty of the felony with which he stands indicted?" demanded the clerk, rising to his feet.

"Not guilty!" said the foreman.

And——

"Not guilty!" volunteered the other jurymen, as if their foreman had not spoken for them.

Will Harcourt was acquitted by acclamation.

CHAPTER XXVIII

"FORTUNE COMES WITH BOTH HANDS FULL"

"THE prisoner is discharged from custody," said the judge.

And, having uttered this official formula, he came down from the bench, offered his hand to the young man so recently on trial for his life, and said:

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"Mr. Harcourt, pray receive my sincere congratulations upon your complete vindication."

"I thank your honor," replied Will Harcourt with a profound bow.

Friends crowded round him.

Among them the old neighbors from Logwood and Lone Lodge. Dr. Wall, Dr. Lathrop, Rev. Mr. Ralph and Silas Wynthrop emulated each other in the heartiness of their congratulations. Professors from his Alma Mater were there to rejoice over the vindication of their favorite student.

Harcourt thanked each and every one of them warmly for the support their presence had given him.

Then he looked around for the two men whose voluntary testimony had certainly saved his life or his liberty.

But neither Charles Cutts nor William Hanson were anywhere to be seen.

As the courtroom was now beginning to be vacated, our whole party held a short consultation, and then by agreement adjourned to the "Cecil Calvert Castle," as the snug little village inn was pompously styled, though it was quite as often facetiously called the "C. C. C."

Here they had luncheon together in the tidy dining room.

After luncheon they all retired to the neat parlor for a social conversation, while waiting until it should be time to go to the railway station.

In a pause of the talk old Parson Ralph, from Logwood, drew a thick letter from his coat pocket and said:

"I have some news for you, my young friend, that will surprise you a little, I think. A certain poet inquires:

" 'Will Fortune never come with both hands full?'

I answer that pessimist, yes, she will—she does. She comes with both hands full to overflowing. Now, what do you think that I have got to tell you?"

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"I am utterly at a loss to say," answered Harcourt, with a look full of curiosity and expectation, which was shared by all his friends.

"I took this letter from the post office this morning. It was forwarded to me from Logwood, to which it had been directed; and although it concerned you, I could not very well hand it to you in the courtroom while the trial was absorbing your attention," said the old parson, still fumbling at the letter in his hand.

"It concerns me?" inquired Harcourt, reaching his hand out for the paper.

"Yes," answered Parson Ralph, without offering to give up the document, and toying mischievously with the young man's impatient curiosity, which was shared by all the party.

"Pray tell me in what way it concerns me," said Harcourt.

"Have you any knowledge or recollection of a certain august lady—one Mistress Horatia Augusta Abercrombie?"

"My great-grandaunt—my grandfather's elder sister? No, no personal knowledge or recollection of her. Great-aunt Horatia Augusta Harcourt married a wealthy Scotchman, who had an estate in North Carolina, and an interest in copper mines. She left Lone Lodge before my father was born, and never revisited that neighborhood after her marriage, I think. To be sure, traveling in those days was not the facile affair that it is now. Great-aunt Horatia Augusta must be over ninety years of age, if she should still be living, which is unlikely."

"She is not living—in this world, at least. She passed away some weeks ago at the advanced age of ninety-three. Being a widow and childless, she left you, her only kinsman, a tidy little competency of seven hundred thousand dollars."

"Sir!" exclaimed Harcourt, starting to his feet, while all the company stared in astonishment, and Roma took his hand and pressed it.

"The news was communicated to me," calmly continued the old parson, "in a letter from the legal firm

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of Pettigru Brothers, Attorneys at Law, Raleigh, North Carolina. They wrote, advising me of the bequest, inquiring your whereabouts and inclosing a letter for you. Here are both letters," concluded Parson Ralph, passing the papers over to Harcourt.

"You will excuse me?" inquired the young man before opening the epistles.

"Oh, certainly! Read and let us know all about it," said Mr. Merritt, speaking for the whole party.

And Harcourt bowed and began to read the letters, while all waited in anxious expectancy.

And while he was so engaged, Parson Ralph was so considerate as to enlighten the company.

"This lady's estate," he explained, "consists in the rich copper mines of North Carolina. And these, in these latter days, have been worked to such great advantage as to have made their proprietor one of the richest women in the country. Our young friend here, as the next of kin, was heir at law, and must have inherited all her estate, even if she had not left it to him by will."

"This is, indeed, utterly unexpected and amazing. I cannot take it in! Cannot realize it!" exclaimed Harcourt, as he folded up the two letters. "It is all so strange and new to me. I know I had a great-aunt living in North Carolina. But I never knew that she was wealthy, or widowed or childless. I never dreamed of being her heir, or of benefiting one dollar through my relationship to her. It is a matter of amazement to me."

"And of congratulation from your friends. My dear fellow, I for one wish you joy with all my heart," said Mr. Merritt heartily.

And his example was followed by all present.

Harcourt responded warmly.

And then, when opportunity offered, he turned aside to Roma and said:

"Ah! my queen! my queen! the greatest satisfaction my accession to fortune gives me, is in the thought that I can now join you in all the noble works you

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have planned, that lie so near your heart, and that we will carry on together."

Dr. Lathrop warned his companions that if they wished to catch their train they must start at once.

Then the party from Williamsburg and the party from Logwood bade farewell to Roma and her friends and set out for the railway depot.

Roma, Harcourt, Mr. Merritt and Dr. Washburn were left alone.

Then ensued some little conversation between the friends and Roma inquired:

"What is the hour?"

"Half-past two," replied Mr. Merritt.

"Then there is quite time enough. Will, dear, I cannot break a promise, especially a promise given to a confiding child. Go to the isle, please, and fetch little Owlet. You can get back here in two hours," said Roma, turning to Harcourt, whom she was to wed that same afternoon.

"You promised that she should be present at our wedding? Quite right," said the young man, smiling.

"I—I promised that she should be my bridesmaid," said Roma.

Harcourt raised her hand to his lips, bowed over it and then turned to Mr. Merritt and said:

"Meanwhile you will kindly go to the register's office and get out the license for me, and also speak to the minister?"

"With pleasure, and I will not play you such a trick as Hanson did," replied the lawyer.

Then both men left the parlor together, Harcourt to go to Snowden and cross to the Isle of Storms to fetch Owlet and Mr. Merritt to the courthouse and the parsonage to do his interesting errands.

Roma and her friend, Dr. Washburn, were left together.

"Is this hasty marriage wise, my dear child?" he inquired, uneasily.

"It is right, dear friend. Remember, I have been engaged to Will for nearly three years. Seven months ago I went to church to be married to him. Since that

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he has suffered so much! Ah! so much, that I must begin to console him immediately—yes, from this very day! You will give me away, will you not?"

"I will do anything you wish, dear child."

"And Mr. Merritt will be Will's best man, and Owlet will be my bridesmaid. What a very peculiar pair of attendants they will make," said Roma with a silvery laugh—ah! blessed laugh that surprised even herself—for she had not laughed before for nearly a year.

The doctor glanced down at her dress, a soft, gray cashmere suit, with gray straw hat, gray gauze veil and gray kid gloves.

"I never heard of a young lady of wealth and position, mistress of herself and fortune, who would consent to be married without a wedding dress and a wedding outfit," he said.

"I cannot let Will wait for my finery. I must begin to console him for all his unhappiness as soon as I possibly can," she replied.

Presently Mr. Merritt came in.

"I have got the license," he said. "You had better look at it, Roma, and see that it is all right this time. Your omitting to do so before led to a good deal of trouble," he added.

"I never saw such a document in my life. I will look at this as a matter of curiosity," she answered.

He put the paper in her hands, and while she looked over it he said:

"I have also spoken to the Rev. Mr. Neale, rector of the church here. He will be glad to officiate, and will have the church opened at four o'clock this afternoon. I particularly stipulated that the window shades should all be up, and the scene as light as the sun could make it. We won't have any deeds of darkness this time. If I had been on hand, there would have been nothing of the sort the other time."

Mr. Merritt was evidently full of fun.

In less than the allotted two hours Will Harcourt returned with little Owlet.

The child rushed into the lady's arms and covered her with caresses.

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"I am so glad! so glad, Lady! Oh! so glad! so glad!" she repeated over and over again.

But presently she said:

"Oh, why don't you have a grand wedding, with wreaths of flowers and white veils and frosted cake and—and things?"

"We should have to wait too long to get all that ready. Wouldn't you rather that we should be married this afternoon just as we are? And then go right home to the isle and rest quiet and peaceful? After all the trouble we have had, is not that the better way?"

"Oh, yes! Come to think of it, so I would!"

When it was time for them to start, the five friends left the hotel together and walked quietly to the church, which was not far off.

No one had heard of the impending marriage, so the party entered the building without observation.

And there William Harcourt and Roma Fronde were quietly married, Dr. Washburn giving the bride away.

"This is the third time we have had to congratulate you to-day. First, upon your triumphant vindication by the jury; secondly, upon your accession to a large fortune; thirdly, lastly and most heartily, upon your marriage with—yes, I must say it, even in her presence —the most excellent woman of the earth," said Dr. Washburn as he cordially shook hands with the bridegroom and reverently saluted the bride by pressing his lips to her forehead.

"Come, doctor!" exclaimed Mr. Merritt, taking the arm of his old friend and drawing it through his own. "Our occupation is gone. We are not needed here. Let you and me go away and be miserable together, as *le grand monarque* used to say to his favorite abbé when they were tired of their orgies."

"I decline to be miserable at all. I decline the rôle of the dog in the manger also. My dear Roma and Harcourt, this is the very happiest day of my whole life. God bless you both!" again earnestly exclaimed the doctor.

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"I am very glad, too! Lady knows I am glad, Mr. William. As an old friend of the family, I always advised it, and I 'prove of it," said Owlet, who had been impatiently waiting to put in her word.

"Thank you, little one. Will you give me a kiss now?" inquired Harcourt.

"Well," said Owlet reflectively, "as you are now one of the family, and a kind of a sort of a relation, I may do so, if Lady has no objection." And she stood on tiptoes and offered her cheek for the salute.

"Lady has no objection, I feel quite sure," said Harcourt, suiting the action to the word. "But suppose, now, instead of continuing to call me Mr. William, you should begin to call me uncle?—or Uncle Will?"

"Oh, no! I couldn't do that!" exclaimed Owlet, shaking her head.

"But why not?"

"Oh, because we call all the old colored gentlemen 'uncles,' you know."

"Well, then, what will you call me?"

"I don't know. I must 'flect on it," gravely concluded Owlet.

By this time they had left the church and were walking quietly down the street leading to the railway station. They had plenty of time, and walked leisurely, meeting but few people, none of whom seemed to suspect the quiet group to be a wedding party.

But when about half way between the church and the depot they met, to their astonishment, Charles Cutts, the Baltimore broker, the self-styled executioner of Nathan Yelverton, the gambler—face to face!

He had a wild and haggard look, yet he struck his hand heartily into that of the young man, exclaiming loudly:

"Ah, how do you do, Harcourt! I have been looking for you. Introduce me to your friends."

Will Harcourt could not do otherwise than comply by simply saying:

"Dr. Washburn, Mr. Merritt, Mrs. Harcourt, Miss Nouvellini—Mr. Charles Cutts."

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He bowed; they bowed. But the broker evidently scarcely heard or heeded their names. His manner was distrait.

"You are surprised to see me here at large, no doubt. Well, I am surprised to find myself out of prison, too," he said as he turned and walked beside the young man. "I have not run away and I don't intend to. No, no. I am waiting here the action of the authorities. They can take me whenever they like. It is treating me with contempt; that is what it is. But perhaps they don't want to put the commonwealth to the expense of a useless trial. And useless it would be, they know, for they never could get a jury to do anything but applaud by act," added Cutts as he walked along beside the party.

"I am indebted to you for my life and liberty. I am glad to have this opportunity of expressing my undying gratitude," said Harcourt earnestly.

"Yes, confound you!" exclaimed Cutts, a wild look leaping to his face; "I knew you would sooner or later accuse yourself of that deed of which you were as innocent in fact as you were in intention, and that I should have to come forward to accuse myself and vindicate you, even at cost of exposing all my family to shame and sorrow. What did you do it for, you idiot?" he fiercely demanded.

Before the startled and amazed young man could reply, little Owlet spoke up, deprecatingly:

"Oh, Mr. Knife, you mustn't blame him. He is very nice and very good, but he's not possessed of common sense."

Cutts paid not the slightest attention to the child, but turned almost furiously on the shrinking Roma and demanded:

"Why do you shrink from my contact, madam? Are you afraid of contamination? Do you look upon me as a murderer? Do you look upon the unfortunate hangman as a murderer? Do you suppose that I took any more pride or pleasure in the execution of that criminal than the hangman does in his dreadful duty? I had to execute that felon! I had to do it! It was

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laid on me, and I could not escape it. I had to avenge women betrayed! Boys ruined! Society outraged! It was dreadful to have to do it, but I did it! I did it! And now a woman shrinks from me as if I were accursed!" said the old man bitterly.

"Oh, no, indeed, I do not," earnestly remonstrated Roma. "I pity you from the depths of my soul. I will pray for you daily from this time."

They had now reached the depot and paused before its entrance.

"Thank you! thank you!" said Cutts. "You are gentle and benevolent! I will now bid you good-by. Will you shake hands with me, madam? Will you permit me to wish you every blessing in the gift of Heaven?" he pleaded holding out his hand.

Roma strove to overcome her strong repugnance to touch the hand that had shed the blood of man, even under exasperating and maddening circumstances, and then held out her hand.

"Thank you! thank you!" he said as he took it and pressed it to his lips; "thank you and bless you."

Then he took leave of the three gentlemen and went away.

"I am very glad that he is free," said Harcourt; "but I do not understand how it is that he is not arrested."

"It is strange," added the doctor.

"He is a lunatic, and now a harmless one. Besides, as he says, he never could be convicted. Our juries don't hang men for avenging the dishonor of their women."

The train now came dashing up to the station, and our party hastened to get their tickets and take their seats.

It was luckily the express, and in less than twenty-five minutes whirled them into the Snowden station.

Roma, Harcourt and Owlet rose from their seats.

Dr. Washburn and Mr. Merritt also stood up, but did not leave their places.

"Come!" said Harcourt impatiently. "Come! Look alive or you'll be taken on to Washington City."

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"That is all right! We are going to Washington City."

"Oh, no, no, no!" Roma expostulated.

"Oh, yes, yes, yes!" exclaimed Mr. Merritt. "We took our tickets to that end. And now, if you don't hurry up and bid us good-by and get off the train, it is you who will be taken to Washington against your will. You can send our traps on by express, if you will be so good as to do so."

"Oh, but——" began Roma.

"Oh, but——" interrupted Dr. Washburn, "we could not think of intruding on you at the present time. A month hence, if you will permit us——"

"Say a week hence, and I will let you off."

"You suicidal woman, you will be carried off. A week hence, then we will pay our respects to you. Now away with you!"

There was a hearty handshaking and parting.

Harcourt sprang out upon the platform, handed Roma down, and then reached for little Owlet, who fell into his arms from the impetus of the starting train, and indignantly exclaimed, as soon as she had recovered herself:

"There, now! You like to have broken my neck! I declare to man, you are not possessed—but it's no use talking."

"I beg your pardon, ma'am," said Harcourt gravely.

But Owlet left his side and went and took the hand of "Lady."

And so they walked from the depot down the country road leading into the main street of the village, and through that into the sandy road leading to the shore.

Here Harcourt found Pete Simmons' large boat disengaged. He hired it, and the party of three entered and took their seats. Simmons was the same man whose son Tommy's boat Harcourt had borrowed for his last trip to the isle, and from which he would have overpaid the boy if his generous impulse had not been checked by the father. Simmons recognized the

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young gentleman at once and heartily congratulated him on his acquittal.

Harcourt thanked him.

Then the boatman and his mate gave their whole attention to their oars. Wind and tide were in their favor, and so in an unusually short time they were rowed across the bay ad landed on the isle.

Tom and Titus were on the sand to meet the boat, for which they had been watching all the afternoon, and which they had sighted from afar off.

Just as soon as the boatmen had received their pay and turned from the shore the two boys ran forward to welcome the newcomers and proffer their services.

Titus, who was a specialist in bowing, bowed very low while he gripped his hat in both hands and said:

"If you please, mum, might I make so free as to wish you all the joy in this world, mum, and the next one, too, for the Lord knows I do with all my heart and soul! I do for a fact, and the gentleman, too, mum!" —with another bow that included Harcourt.

"I thank you, Titus. I feel sure that you are quite sincere in your warm good wishes," said the lady, giving him her hand.

Then, turning to her husband, she presented the boy, saying:

"This is my young friend, Titus Blair, who has been the greatest use to me since we have been on the isle, and whose worthy ambition it is to be useful in all good services."

"I am very glad to see you, Titus," said Harcourt, taking the hand of the shy, blushing but delighted lad.

"And this is my dear, good Tom," said Roma, introducing the black boy, "who is scarcely less useful and devoted than Titus. He is a native of the isle, which he very naturally considers the proper center of the universe. In fact, he estimates the importance of all other places by the scale of their distance from the 'Isle of Storms.'"

"And quite right, too, Thomas. I am exactly of your opinion," said Harcourt, laughing and shaking hands

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with the black boy, who grinned from ear to ear, and said vaguely he "knowed it."

"The gentleman's valise and things have come, mum, which I put 'em into the spare room," said Titus.

"The gentleman's valise?" inquired Roma with a puzzled air; then, with sudden enlightenment, she exclaimed: "Oh, I see! Will, here is another instance of Mr. Merritt's thoughtfulness. He remembers everything. Evidently, when he went to the courthouse to get our marriage license, he went a little further and had your effects sent on here by a special messenger."

"I am more indebted to him because I never once thought of these things myself," said Harcourt as they began to ascend the cliff.

On the plateau, in front of the house, they found Annie Moss waiting for them.

She offered her congratulations with an almost holy smile that was in itself a benediction.

Then the whole party entered the house, where a supper had been prepared for them, under Mistress Annie's own personal supervision.

At the door of the dining room Jerusalem and Wilet met their new master and their mistress with bows and courtesies and smiles and words of warm if homely rejoicings.

No festivities attended the marriage of William Harcourt and Roma Fronde, nor would such have been in keeping with the circumstances. But a deep peace, a holy content and profound gratitude pervaded their spirits.

Nor were their plans of future happiness exactly like those of other newly married people. Their trials had been too soul-searching. Life had been made too serious, almost too solemn, for any such "ringing of wedding bells," either literally or metaphorically.

After supper, when the two sat tête-à-tête on the front piazza of their home, with the summer sea spread out before them, and the summer starlit sky above them, their talk was not of pleasure trips, of social triumphs, or any selfish enjoyments; it was of

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the good their united lives and fortunes might do for the world in which they lived.

Some feeling of compunction and humiliation very naturally and inevitably lingered in the spirit of Harcourt, which, although not expressed by him, was perceived by Roma, who took his hand and said:

"'The past comes not back again.' The long future is ours. Let us both redeem our lives."

"'Both?' he said. 'Both?' You, my immaculate! You, my holy one! What have you to redeem in your life?"

"Yes, I! I have much to redeem! I who have been self-righteous, self-complacent, self-seeking, and, oh! utterly self-deceiving all my life until lately! In times not so long past I lived only for self and the world!"

"I cannot see how!" said Harcourt.

"I turned Thomas Todd off the Isle of Storms, because I wanted it all to myself and to my flatterers; for my own pride and vanity, to entertain, ostentatiously, my own friends and acquaintances, who were, every one of them, well able to entertain themselves at any of the fashionable summer resorts they might choose to patronize—not thinking, or caring to think, that poor Thomas Todd might be really doing a better work in keeping a seaside resort for a paying public than I had proposed to do by making the place a private house of summer hospitalities for the privileged few, who do not need such favors, because they were able to go wherever they might please."

"It was natural to wish to entertain your friends," put in Harcourt.

"Yes, it was quite natural, and it would have been blameless if the motive had been affection; but, Will, dear, it was nothing of the sort! It was vainglory! In times not long past I have cherished a vain social ambition—with a longing to reign a queen of society—to be talked of, written about, praised, lauded, glorified in every way! Ah, how vain, how petty, how ridiculous it all seems to me now, in view of the purer life, the higher possibilities that open before us now. You, dear Will, have had your dream of professional

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and political ambition. You would be heard in courts and in senates—a power in both. Let us renounce our dreams of personal aggrandizement, dear Will. Let us live for the Lord and His suffering humanity. Oh, and especially for His innocent, poor, suffering children. Join me in this heavenly work, dear Will, and we shall be happier than we could ever have been if all the dreams of our unawakened days had been realized."

So she talked with him, so she argued with him, but he replied:

"I am not worthy, Roma; I am not worthy to work in the vineyard of the Lord. I was tempted and I sinned."

"You were tempted! Oh, my dear, I myself have felt the power of temptation."

"You, Roma! You! Impossible!"

"Listen. Once, when that man Hanson was in my power—I have forgiven him now, but let that pass—once, I say, when he was in my power, at my mercy, I certainly realized how a woman, how any human being, might be drawn or driven into irresistible temptation. When I was a prisoner in this house, and William Hanson was my jailer, and when a fit of deadly intoxication placed him in my power, at my mercy, I was tempted to free myself by the sacrifice of his life. I knew that there was not a jury in the world who would not have acquitted me if I had taken that man's life—not a community in the world who would not have applauded the act. And so I was tempted. And if I did not yield to the temptation, I was brought into the understanding of how men and women under similar circumstances, have become homicides. And so I came into the knowledge of the fearful capacities for evil latent in myself and others. It was a terrible revelation to me. It is heredity. And this heredity is almost fate—kismet—predestination. And yet we all know and feel that temptation can be resisted."

While they talked in this manner, Annie Moss had carried off Owlet to the children's dormitory. And, finally, when every baby was asleep in its little cot,

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and the two nurses showing signs of drowsiness, Mrs. Annie led the child to her own room and said:

"Darling, you will stay with me after this."

"Oh, yes. I know," sighed the owl. "I know I can never have Lady all to myself any more. I heard all about it in the church—'forsake all others,' and all that. But I do declare to the Lord above that it is very hard."

And with this protest Owlet submitted to the inevitable.

CHAPTER XXIX

A GREAT SURPRISE FOR ANNIE

THE next morning, while Harcourt, Roma and little Owlet were strolling along the beach toward the northern and more solitary part of the island, the point called the Rattles, on account of the noise made by the water among the rocks, they saw a boat approaching the isle from Snowden.

"Visitors, so early?" wondered Roma.

"Who can that be?" inquired Harcourt.

"They are not possessed of common sense, whoever they are," remarked Owlet, "backsliding" into the formula.

The party turned and retraced their steps toward the house.

"Where did you pick up that scrap of wisdom about common sense, Miss Catherine?" inquired Harcourt with a laugh.

"Oh, I don't know. Years and years ago I thought how many people were not possessed of common sense," replied the child.

"And who first gave you the appropriate name of Owlet?"

"The Lord above knows. I don't," she declared, shaking her head.

They went up on the porch and remained standing

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to receive the visitor, who had landed from the boat and was seen climbing up the cliff.

When he reached the plateau they recognized Charles Cutts.

"Why on earth should the poor soul come here?" inquired Roma.

"I understand it from experience," replied Harcourt. "It is from the restlessness of a perturbed mind. Instead of flying from justice, he is waiting to be arrested. Time is a burden, and he does not know how to get rid of it," Harcourt replied.

And he went down the steps to meet the lunatic, who had saved his life or liberty.

"Surprised to see me again. 'Bad penny always coming back,' eh?" said Cutts, without waiting for Harcourt to speak to him.

"No, I am not surprised. I understand," quietly replied the young man as he joined him. And they walked toward the house.

"Ah, yes. I know you do, of course."

"Come in," said the younger man, when they reached the house. And Cutts hesitated, as if doubtful of his welcome.

Roma also came to the top of the steps and said:

"Good morning, Mr. Cutts. Will you walk up?"

He bowed in silence and went up the short flight of stairs that led to the piazza.

Roma then led the way into the front sitting room, and Harcourt placed a chair for the visitor. Only deep compassion filled their hearts for him.

He talked somewhat at random about his mission as an avenger, not only of his own betrayed daughter and ruined home, but of all the victims of the unprincipled gambler.

Roma listened in silence and in some distress.

Harcourt did not attempt to turn the conversation, or rather the monologue, for he knew what a relief it was to the man to talk.

But in the midst of this a thunderbolt fell—a thunderbolt not of destruction, but of amazement.

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Annie Moss entered the room, sprang backward and stood aghast.

Charles Cutts started to his feet and stared at her as though he were suddenly bereft of his senses.

A minute of stupefaction passed.

Then——

"Annabel!" he exclaimed and yearningly held out his arms.

"Father!" she cried.

And the next moment she was clasped to his heart.

"Oh, Annabel! Annabel! Why did you ever listen to a villain's lies and leave me?" he wailed.

"Father! Father! I never disobeyed you in my life, though I know you were led to believe so! We were both deceived. When you hear my account of it all you will understand."

He was much more shaken than she was. She guided his steps to a sofa and made him sit down, and she sat beside him.

Both seemed stricken with oblivion of their surroundings and company.

Roma, astounded by what had happened before her eyes, at first remained immovable, but soon recovering herself, made a sign to Harcourt and slipped out of the room, silently followed by him.

Annie's explanation came afterward. Her story was given first to her father, in a fragmentary manner, with much emotion and some incoherence, for both were very much agitated.

After that it was given in a more connected and coherent form to her benefactress.

She began by saying:

"I do not know how the mistake that led to the belief in my fall and in my death could have occurred, but since I have thought it over I have an opinion about it. There was a poor unfortunate girl in that hospital where I really was ill. She occupied a cot in the same ward with myself, and she bore an extraordinary likeness to me. She never would give her name. She died and was removed to the dead house a few

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hours before I was discharged, cured. I think it must have been her body that was mistaken for mine.

"But I must tell you how it all came to pass. I was an only child, motherless from my birth. And oh! such a petted, indulged, spoiled child! I had every reason to believe that the world was made for me. Neither nurse nor teacher was ever allowed to cross my will. They had to coax or bribe me to gain any concession. I was a precocious child, too. At fifteen I looked fully eighteen. I tell you this to account for the fact that at the dancing-school ball that I attended I attracted the attention of Mr. Allan McArthur, who soon began to show his preference.

"My mind had not kept pace with my body in development, for when, a few weeks later, he told me he loved me I must have shown my delight, for he immediately asked me to marry him. I thought it was very fine to be engaged to be married before I was sixteen years of age, so I promised to be his wife if my father would consent.

"Then he went about in the most old-fashioned and highly honorable way and got an introduction to my father through our family physician.

"When he asked for me my dear father questioned him very closely, and then said that he must have a talk with me before he could give an answer.

"Then he sent for me and asked me if I really loved this young suitor. I told him yes, for I really thought I did. Then he said that as the young man had presented the best credentials, we might become engaged on the condition that we were not to marry until I should have attained the age of eighteen years and Allan McArthur should have gained his doctor's degree, for he was a medical student. He added that if our affection was genuine it would stand the test of time and absence. If it was not, we had better find that out before marriage than afterward.

"I was very well content, for indeed I did not wish to be married; I only wanted the honor of being an engaged young lady.

"My lover thought it was a long time to wait, but

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the alternative was to agree to the terms or to renounce me. He agreed to the terms.

"He was allowed to visit me every day while he stayed at home and to correspond with me after he had left Baltimore for New York to resume his studies at the College of Physicians and Surgeons.

"Soon after that my father was obliged to go to Europe on business, leaving me in charge of the resident governess and the faithful colored servants.

"It was then the serpent entered my Eden. I do not wish to blame others too much or myself too little. Heaven knows I have repented my weakness and blindness in sackcloth and ashes of the spirit.

"Yelverton came to the house and became a daily visitor. I do not know how it was that my governess permitted his visits, unless he deceived or bribed or mastered her in some way.

"At any rate, he came every day, took us both out riding in the morning and escorted us to some place of amusement in the evening.

"He soon began to court me. Ah, how he wooed! What an adept he was at it! What arts he used! I could not tell you.

"He laughed at my engagement with 'that boy,' as he called Allan McArthur. He made me acknowledge that I did not care much about marrying the medical student, after all. At least just then.

"He told me I could not love the silly youth; that neither of us knew what love really was.

"Ah! and that he would teach me. He did teach me. Yes, what the love of demons in the dark world below must be!

"I do not understand it even now; but somehow he managed to attract, fascinate and master my soul. Yet, I assure you, not so utterly as to make me lose my self-respect. Ah, no! My mother's daughter could not fall so low as that.

"He urged me to marry him, but I told him that I could only do so on two conditions—the first was that I should get a release from my engagement to Allan

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McArthur from his own hand and the second was that I should get the consent of my father.

"Then he advised me to write to young McArthur and ask for my release. I told him that I could not do so—I had not the moral courage.

"Then he offered to do 'the disagreeable duty,' as he called it, for me. And I immediately consented, for I was thoroughly psychologized by that Satan. He wrote both to my father and to McArthur, and he read the letters to me. I heartily approved of their style, and warmly thanked the writer for taking off my hands a painful task that he had performed so much better than I ever could have done.

"But, as I have discovered, he never sent and could not have intended to send, those letters.

"In a few days he read me a letter purporting to come from Allan McArthur, releasing me from my engagement to him, and adding that he himself had lately doubted whether our fancied love had not been the mere vanity of two dancing-school partners, and our betrothal absurdly premature, and much better broken off.

"The letter was addressed to Yelverton in answer to his own, so that I never asked to read it myself, or even to take it in my own hand. I did not wish to do so. I had heard it read. That was enough.

"How glad I was that I had taken the initiative and asked for my release. How dreadful it would have been, I thought, to have been married to a man who repented his engagement to me.

"I did not then know, as I now know, that the letter was a skillful forgery.

"In less than four weeks he brought me a letter purporting to come from my father, in my father's perfectly imitated handwriting, with which he was quite familiar. And with the London postmark on the envelope, conclusive evidence of its authenticity, if evidence had been required by such a credulous idiot as I was at that time. But I was utterly destitute of suspicion. It never occurred to me to suspect that he had forged the letter and put it into some London

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stamped envelope of some letter that had been mailed to him from abroad by some other correspondent.

"The forged letter gave a prompt consent to our marriage, on condition that young Allan McArthur would resign his claim on my hand, which the writer could not doubt that he would do; congratulated us both on our mutual attachment, and expressed delight that his little daughter was going to marry a man instead of a boy; wished us both all the happiness this world could afford; advised, under the new circumstances, that our marriage should not be delayed, but that we should be wedded at once and come on to Europe for our bridal tour and join him at St. Petersburg, to which city he was about to go on business.

"I was mad with childish delight. Yelverton said we should be married quietly that day and start for Europe by the very next steamer if we could secure a passage. He telegraphed to New York to inquire, and got answer that we could get a stateroom on the steamer that was to sail for Liverpool on the following Friday.

"Then he hurried up our marriage. I forgot to say that my governess had been called away a few days before by the illness of her mother, who lived in Boston.

"And now, as there were only colored people in the house, my lover (?) took me alone to another house, which he told me was a parsonage, and introduced me to a gentleman in black—the gentleman in black he must have been—who, he told me, was the Rev. Mr. Jamieson, of the Methodist Church, whose clergymen never wear gowns, and to two women, whom he called Mrs. Jamieson and Miss Jamieson, wife and sister of the minister.

"It was all deception! All the blackest treachery. I believe that house must have been one of the worst in the whole city, and that man and those women sinners above all sinners, else why should they have conspired to ruin a poor, motherless child as I was then?

"However, the 'Rev.' Mr. Jamieson read the mar-

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riage ceremony over us, and pronounced us man and wife, the two women being witnesses.

"Who so wickedly triumphant as my bridegroom? Who so proud and delighted as myself? My conscience was clear of sin. I had not broken with my betrothed; he was glad to release me. I had not disobeyed my father; he had given his cordial consent to our marriage. And last, and most joyful, I had married my hero, my ideal.

"Oh, the idiot that I was!

"It is the old, old story, ever new; the story that will be told and retold as long as the world shall last. I was an enchanted fool in a fool's paradise.

"I went home and packed up in a flutter of delight; gave away all my left-off clothes and every cent of my pocket money to the colored servants, and told them I was going to Europe to join my father, and that Mr. Yelverton was going to escort me.

"Though proud and delighted to be married to my hero, I was somewhat shy of telling our faithful old servants that I had gone away from home to be married in such a hurry. I feared, also, that they would think it very hard that I had not been married in my own parlor, where they might have been permitted to stand humble spectators at the doors, for such was often the custom among our neighbors.

"That same night Yelverton and myself started for New York.

"We reached Philadelphia about ten o'clock and stayed there until noon next day.

"Then we resumed our journey and reached New York in the afternoon.

"The next morning we embarked on the steamship *Asia*, bound for Liverpool.

"And Yelverton seemed so kind to me. I had long thought him a hero, but then I thought him an angel!"

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CHAPTER XXX

ANNIE'S PERIL

"After a very prosperous voyage of nine days, we arrived at Liverpool on the afternoon of a fine autumn day.

"We only stopped for a hasty lunch at the Adelphi, and then took the mail train for London, where we arrived about midnight.

"We stopped at Langham's.

"The next morning I was very anxious to go right on to St. Petersburg, but Yelverton pleaded for a little trip to Paris first, urging that 'our' good father would not grudge us our little frolic.

"He seemed such an angel to me, deferring to my every whim, that I could not oppose him on this one wish. Besides this, I also had a craving curiosity to see Paris. I yielded.

"We went down to Dover, crossed the Channel to Calais, and rand up, by train, to Paris. There we spent four weeks in such a delirious round of pleasure that I must have had my head turned, for I left off teasing to be taken to my father and left the time of our going entirely to the will of Yelverton.

"At length it seemed to become expedient to him that we should leave Paris. I have often thought since that it was on account of the police.

"He announced his intention to go to St. Petersburg the very next day. I was delighted and packed up at once."

"But the next morning he came to me with a very solemn face and said:

"My adored, I have very bad news for you. Be a woman; bear up.'

" 'My father!' I said. 'What has happened to him?'

" 'We know now why your dutiful letters have not been answered. He was not a young man. He was in feeble health. He——'

" 'Is dead!' I said.

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"And as he nodded assent, I fell and lost consciousness in the first and last swoon I ever experienced in my life.

"When I recovered, to find him bending over me, with the most affectionate solicitude expressed in his face, and doing all that he could to restore me, I tried to rouse myself for his sake. After I had succeeded in doing this, and asked for the details of my father's death, he showed me what seemed to be a letter from a Russian doctor, describing minutely my father's illness, death and his burial in some Russian cemetery, with a hard name that has escaped my memory.

"Then I begged to be taken to St. Petersburg to see his grave and to carry his remains back to Baltimore for burial beside my mother's shrine; but he told me, falsely, of course, that the Russian Government were very despotic and would not permit a grave once closed ever to be opened.

"Still I pleaded to go and look on the place where they had laid him; but, with many tender caresses, he assured me that I was unfit in my distressed state of mind to brave the rigors of a Russian winter; that it would certainly make me ill, probably kill me. And he opposed my pleadings with gentle firmness and redoubled all his affectionate attentions to me.

"We went over to England that day and lived very quietly. I went into deep mourning and secluded myself at home. For days he stayed in with me, but soon got tired of that and tried to persuade me to go out to places of amusement.

"I refused. That I could not do, even to please my hero, my angel, who was so good to me.

"He never changed in his tender devotion to me while he remained with me. Perhaps he feared 'scenes' with women; perhaps he dreaded hysterics. At any rate, he never gave me an unkind look or [illegible], even when I persisted in refusal to go out with [illegible], but was tender, indulgent, affectionate always. Therefore I was utterly unprepared for the thunderbolt that fell upon my devoted head one day.

"He had not come in on the previous night. The

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event was unprecedented. We had been staying at a West End hotel since coming to London, and he had never left me alone for a night. I was unhappy at his strange absence, but not anxious, for I knew my hero could take care of himself.

"When morning came, and slowly passed into noon, I grew more unhappy in his absence, but yet not anxious, so sure I felt that no harm could come to my king of men.

"Late in the afternoon a visitor sent up his card:

"'The Duke of Altamont.'

"I had met him very often in Paris. He was a handsome old man, certainly seventy years old, with a fine, tall, erect figure, a classic profile, silvery white hair and beard, fine teeth and dark eyes full of fire and softness, and with a caressing voice and winning manner. I had admired him very much, and in my idiocy and inexperience, trusting in his advanced age not to be misunderstood, I had shown my preference openly, as to a grandfather whom I loved.

"Well, I was very glad to receive him in my pretty parlor. I met him with both hands outstretched to welcome him, gave him the luxurious resting-chair, and—like a fool—drew a hassock and sat at his feet, to show him reverence, let his hand rest on my head and his fingers stray among my curls.

"Ah, was there ever such an imbecile? Even Paris had taught me nothing. Even in our delicious round of pleasure—looking back now—I think my 'husband' took good care to guard me from the knowledge of its grossness, or, as some would call it, its more 'refined' wickedness.

"I told my patriarchal friend of the unaccountable absence of my husband, and asked if he had seen him.

"'Yes,' he said, he had seen Mr. Yelverton. And then he added: 'But my blooming rose is losing her color. She is a white rose to-day. She has had a sleepless night. Inhale this.' And he handed me a little cut-glass vial, in a golden net, set with emeralds. No; it was not what you suspect. It was not chloroform, nor amyl, nor any other deadly drug to produce

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unconsciousness or helplessness. The patriarch was not that sort of brute. He was far too 'refined' and too 'esthetic.' But it was the most delicious and entrancing perfume ever inhaled by mortal senses. I think now it was some compound to dull, to soothe and palliate pain of mind or body, to make one indifferent to everything but the delight of living, of resting, and inhaling that.

"While I still sniffed it, and smiled the thanks I was too luxuriously indolent to utter with my tongue, my handsome patriarch smiled back on me.

"'That father's beard was long and white;
With love and truth his brow seemed bright.'

"I often recall Browning's lines when thinking of him. Presently he said that he had seen Mr. Yelverton; that sudden business had called him away; and that he had intrusted him with a letter to be delivered to me.

"I took that letter and read it through. Oh! how shall I tell you what that letter was? He told me that he loved me as much as ever; that he loved me too tenderly to ask me to share the fortunes of so poor a man as himself; for that he had spent all his ready money and had no property to raise more on; that he would have to depart for

"'Fresh fields and pastures green'

before he could raise another crop. He wrote that he had not the courage to take a personal leave of me, as he could neither endure the sight of my tears nor refrain from them himself; that he commissioned our mutual friend, the Duke of Altamont, to deliver his farewell letter and to take the position he was no longer able to occupy; that the duke would be a protector, much more worthy than he could ever be; that happily there was no legal bar to the new arrangement, as the form of marriage gone through for the satisfaction of my pride or conscience was in no way,

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binding. It had been read by a young friend who was not in holy orders, and without the necessary marriage license. That the best thing I could do was to accept the protection of the duke and remain in England, since my father was dead, his estate seized by his creditors, and he, my devoted lover, reduced to beggary, or next to it. He bade me drop my superstitions, as he called my religious faith, and enjoy my youth, and give joy by my beauty, and make the most of this life, for this was all that we could be sure of.

"Well, the divine or the diabolical drug that I was still sniffing enabled me to bear all this. It soothed my nerves and gently stimulated my spirits, but it did not for an instant confuse my vision of right and wrong. I handed back the letter to my patriarchal visitor in silence.

"He laid his hand on my head and said:

" 'My child, this is very hard on you.'

" 'Yes,' I said, 'it is very hard. The man I confidingly took to be my husband turns out to be a treacherous villain. If my poor father had lived, he would have killed him.'

" 'That would have been very severe. Yelverton was always tender of you, and only left you when he was driven away by debts, and only avoided a personal farewell to save pain to both of you,' he said very gently. It seemed as if age had made him beautifully gentle instead of infirm.

" 'Then,' I said, 'he was at best a tender-hearted demon.'

" 'Let us not speak of him until you can think more kindly. Dear child,' he continued, 'come back. You have no cause to fear or distrust me.' For I had risen from the hassock at his feet and seated myself in a chair by the window.

" 'No, let me sit here,' I answered.

"After a while he spoke again.

" 'I have settled Yelverton's bill at the hotel here. I have a villa, not at St. John's Wood, that paradise of Bohemia, for my lovely white rose is not one of them; but at Sydenham, that Garden of Eden in which the

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Crystal Palace stands. My carriage is at the door. Dear child, accept the refuge of the villa, where ready servants wait to receive and attend you, and I would never intrude on your presence without your permission. In time you might come to tolerate me.' Most women, I think, would have burst forth in righteous indignation and covered the old man with scorn and contempt. I could not do so. I was deficient in indignation. And then I was soothed by the halcyon drug I was still inhaling, for its power did not seem to be accumulative, but evanescent. I did not feel angry with the man, nor could I answer him angrily. I said:

" 'If you had not mistaken me very much, you never would have made me such a proposal. No, no more than you would have made it to one of the daughters of the good queen; for, although you are not a Christian, I think you are a gentleman.'

"He bowed and then raised his brows in some surprise. I went on:

" 'You found me in an immoral position, and judged me accordingly. I did not know my real position, or I would not have occupied it for one moment. I was the child of Christian parents. I was brought up religiously. I believed myself to be a dutiful daughter, a blameless wife and a faithful Christian. I have been a member of the Episcopal Church—the same as your Church of England—since my fourteenth year. And I could not live "without God in the world." I would rather lose everything in life—everything than Him. I do not know how any one can live "without God in the world." I would rather work myself to death, or starve, or beg, if I hadn't the patience to starve, than lead the life you would offer me. You have been very kind to me, and I thank you. But I think you had better leave me now.'

"He hesitated. I said:

" 'You are a gentleman. You will not stay when you see that your presence distresses me.' And I handed him his halcyon vial.

" 'Good-by,' he said. 'I shall keep an eye on you to see that you come to no harm. As to this bauble, I

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bought it in Smyrna. Keep it. You will not find anything like it in Europe or America'; and he laid the balcyon vial on the mantel shelf and left the room. That bottle had done me good service. It had cleared my brain and calmed my nerves and enabled me to go through the ordeal and even talk to him.

"But I am making this story too long. I must be brief. When I was convinced that I never had been Yelverton's lawful wife, but had been led into a position so sinful, degrading, humiliating, I lost no time in making preparations to return to my own country.

"I was very unhappy, but my conscience was clear. I never had been disobedient to my father, or undutiful to my supposed husband, or unfaithful to my Christian profession. I had not remorse to bear in addition to sorrow and mortification.

"With the aid of the chambermaid I sold all my handsome wardrobe to a second-hand clothing dealer and got, I suppose, a fair price for them. My jewels, when I tried to sell them, turned out to be paste. That was in keeping with all my other experiences.

"With the money I raised I paid my remaining dues at the hotel and went down to Liverpool in the second-class cars, and took passage to New York in the second-class cabin of an ocean steamer.

"I got to New York, took a room, furnished it cheaply and tried to get work. But 'the times were hard'; many were out of employment. I lived on what little money I had, and when it was gone I began to pawn my poor effects. The crisis of misfortune came when I was taken ill with typhoid fever alone in my room, with no one to care for me. Then one of the health officers found me and sent me to the free ward of an hospital, and the remnant of my furniture and clothing was seized for rent.

"I told you that in the same ward with me was a girl who was my counterpart. She was dying with consumption. She would never give her name. She died, and her body was taken away to the dead-house on the same day that I was discharged, free and cured, eight weeks from the time of my entrance.

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"That is the way I think the mistake was made that led to the report of my death. Some Christian women, who were visitors to the hospital, when they found that my only desire was to get work, took the attic room in the tenement where Mr. Harcourt found me, put some furniture in it, and got me work.

"One of those women was the wife of the man who kept the large corner store, and for whom I worked for several years. Well, madam, the manager of the ready-made clothing department was a young man named Roland Moss. He became attached to me in the course of time and wanted to marry me.

"I was very, very lone, and I liked his society; but had to reject him, though I told him how precious his friendship was to me, and begged him still to be my friend. I could not then tell him of the treachery that had degraded me and wrecked my life, nor could I practice such a deception on him as to marry him without telling him.

"He knew me only as Miss Annie Bell. I would not sully my father's name by taking it again, nor would I take a false name. Accident solved the difficulty for me. I had told the health officer that my name was Annabel, and he wrote it Annie Bell. That is all.

"I did not behave well to poor Roly Moss. I would not marry him, and I would not let him leave me. I could not, for he seemed to be the last heart I had to cling to. Ah! how women starve for love!

"At last he grew desperate and told me if I could not make up my mind to marry him he must throw up his situation and go to Colorado, where he had a young relative, and become a cowboy on a ranch, and so, by entirely changing scene, occupation and life itself, that he might be able to forget me.

"I knew he meant what he said. And I knew that he was no more fit for the life he proposed to lead than I was. He was extremely delicate and had a constant cough. I knew a rough life would kill him. Besides, I could not bear the thought of losing him. Sooner than lose him, my only friend, by what must seem to

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him only a caprice, I would tell him my humiliating story and let him do as he should please.

"I told him everything, as I have told my father, as I now tell you.

"He had known me long enough to know that I would not deceive him, and the mortifying confession I made added to his esteem for me, for he said if I had not been very conscientious I would never have told him that which was so painful to tell.

"We were married that summer. Ah! ours was a brief wedded life. He took a neat little flat suitable to our limited means, and lived contentedly until midwinter, when he took a severe cold, from which he never recovered, though he lingered until the spring, when he passed away, blessing me, poor fellow, for what he called my devotion to him.

"I had to sell the best of our furniture to pay doctors' bills and funeral costs, and to give up the flat and go back to the attic room, which happened to be vacant. And there I lived and worked until you invited me to take this position as matron of your sanitarium. This, madam, is my whole story," concluded Annie.

"And so far as your action went, a more blameless story could not have been told. But where did you leave your father when you came in to give me this narrative?"

"He went back to Snowden. He said that he would not even seem to run away by staying longer even on the island. Oh, madam! I am so grieved that he should have taken such an awful vengeance on Yelverton. The only thing that keeps me from despair over it is the conviction that he was not responsible, not mentally or morally responsible for his act. But is he not legally responsible? Oh, madam! do you think he will be arrested?" anxiously inquired Annie.

"I do not know. I should think if he was to be brought to trial he would have been arrested before now. But, my dear, even if he should be arraigned, he could never been convicted. Rest easy on that score."

Charles Cutts was never brought to trial. He was considered now little more than a harmless lunatic.

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He lingered about Snowden and came over to the isle whenever the humor took him, and where he was always well received. Annie offered to join him at the Harrison House, where he boarded. But he declined to have her. He said she was much better off for the present on the island.

In the course of that week, and by the same mail, Harcourt received a letter from Hanson and Roma one from Reba.

Both letters were to the same effect.

Hanson wrote that he had seen the notice of the marriage of Harcourt and Miss Fronde; that he wished to express his sincere sorrow for the great wrong he had done them both and the greater wrong he had intended. That he would have prayed their pardon in person, instead of by letter, if he had not known that a personal interview at this juncture would be most painful and embarrassing to both parties. He was about to marry one who, though of no kin to him, had been the dear sister of his heart and life from his earliest memory, and who was now to take a dearer name and nearer claim to his love and loyalty—Reba Bushe. He would take his bride to the Grecian Archipelago for the restoration of her health, and on their return next year he hoped to be permitted to bring her on a visit to see her beloved friend. Finally, he hoped that Harcourt would answer his letter with peace and pardon, and so send him and his beloved Reba on their way rejoicing.

Reba's letter to Roma was all to the same purpose. She wrote that she had been extremely ill and so near death that she had made her will. William had been devoted in his care of her; and when he implored her to "try to live for his sake," his words had given her new life in giving her something to live for. "Because," she frankly added, "I always loved him, and his indifference made me miserable. I know how he has wronged you, but I know also how bitterly sorrowful and ashamed he is. He has been a blind and crazy egotist all his life, and has only recently received a ray of light and a glimmer of reason. I think our

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mother's death and my own near approach to the grave effected this change, or this beginning of a change, that I hope will be well completed."

She then went on to say that she was still very delicate, but that the doctors gave hopes of her final recovery, in the event of her being able to endure the voyage to the Ionian Isles, where the elixir of life was to be found in the air.

William and herself were to be married within a week and were to embark immediately afterward on their voyage.

She hoped and prayed that her beloved Roma would write some words of forgiveness to her, for the repentant sinner, that they might both depart in peace.

When Harcourt had returned his letter to its envelope, and Roma had finished hers, they looked up simultaneously, and their eyes met.

"Well," said the lady, "can you forgive him?"

"Queen Roma! My dearest love, I have had too much forgiven me, not to be able to forgive in my turn. But you—you—is it possible that you can ever do so?"

"Yes, I forgive him with all my heart and soul, as I hope to be forgiven. And I love Reba like a dear sister. If you have no objection, Will, I will write to her and say so, and will invite them both to come to us when they return from Europe."

"I haven't any objection to anything that you propose, my lady. I will answer Hanson's letter in the spirit of yours to Reba. I will join you in your invitation."

So the letters were written the same day.

And other letters were written to Dr. Shaw and Dr. Keech, of Goeberlin, inquiring about the progress of the school buildings at Goblin Hall.

It was not until all these letters had been dispatched by Tom and Titus to the post office at Snowden that Roma recollected, with a sickness of her soul, that there was something else that Hanson had to be called to account for—the desertion of Owlet and her mother.

Yet how to touch upon that matter to Hanson, without mortally wounding Reba, she did not know.

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Finally she determined to confide the whole story of the child to Harcourt, which she had not yet done for lack of opportunity.

While little Owlet was playing with the children on the plateau, she challenged Harcourt for a walk to the Vanishing Point, and as they sauntered along the beach she gave him the history of Marguerite Nouvellini, and the photograph she had found, and the conclusions she had drawn from them.

Then she asked him what was best to be done under the circumstances.

"It is a matter which I cannot let be and yet which I feel that I cannot write to him about," said Roman in conclusion.

"I will write at once," replied Harcourt.

They returned to the house, and Harcourt sat down once more before the writing table and penned his second letter to Hanson that day, telling him the whole story as he had heard it. But the letter could not go off until the next morning, so it followed that it was twenty-four hours behind the first one, and that Harcourt and Roma received the answer to the first letters on Wednesday, heartily responding to their expressions of good will and thankfully accepting their invitation to the isle for the visit to be made immediately after their return from Europe.

And on Thursday Harcourt received an answer to his second letter from Hanson—an answer that surprised, relieved and pleased both himself and Roma, for in it Hanson wrote, after a few words of greeting:

"You labor under the greatest delusion. You accuse me wrongfully. You do me a great injustice, and I am glad of it. I wish you would abuse me to my heart's content. I should then feel less guilty.

"I have been a blind and besotted self-seeker, but never such a villain as to desert a wife and child. In point of fact, I never 'set up' a wife and child. I can prove an alibi by Reba and a college full of professors and chums. I was at Harvard for a whole year preceding that 'Guy Fawkes' Day,' on which your little

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Owl was hatched. I never saw Paris until two years after Madame Marguerite had left it.

"Reba had a French cousin, a citizen of New Orleans, named Guillaume Nouvellini, whom she used to think looked like me. She had his photo, and used to amuse herself by showing it to mutual friends as mine. I never saw the poor fellow in my life, and so I do not know whether the resemblance was real or imaginary.

"But it is certain that I never saw Madame Marguerite in my life, and never was in Paris until years after she had left the French stage."

"I am glad that he has not that sin on his soul," said Roma.

"And now it is I who have got to sit down and write an apology," said Harcourt.

And he did so.

CHAPTER XXXI

CONCLUSION

At the end of that week there was another large consignment of sick children from the slums of the city. And with them came Dr. Washburn again, saying:

"My young medico has disappointed me, confound him! Gone and married an heiress with 'an only mother,' and is going to hang out his shingle in her front basement window. Hope he'll get mother-in-lawed to his heart's discontent! So I have come to offer my services, Roma, my dear! An old fellow, who has set up all his sons in business, married off all his daughters well, buried the old companion of his long life, and retired from active practice, really can do nothing better with the fag-end of his days than to freely devote them to just such a good work as this. And such easy work, too! No going out doors, if I don't want to! No being called up at night! For mind, I don't mean to be waked up 'in the dead waste and middle of the night' by something more terrible

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than the ghost of Hamlet, a baby with a pain in its pinafore or a cramp in its temper. Let the nurses attend to them."

"I am everlastingly indebted to you, dear Dr. Washburn! And I know, notwithstanding what you say, that you will jump up at any hour of the day or night, in season or out of season, to still the faintest wail of a child in pain," said Roma.

"Pooh, pooh, my dear! Pooh, pooh! I have come to enjoy the sea air and the sight of your fair face! And I am here for the season."

It was strange how little care or trouble the infant waifs caused their benefactress. What attention they needed was given them by the doctor and the nurses, but the sea and the air did the most for them.

One morning, early in July, the long-expected letter from Scotland came. It was from the solicitor of the Arbuthnot family and directed to Miss Fronde. It informed Roma that Mistress Arbuthnot, of Arbuthnot, had instructed the writer to say that she declined to recognize the grandchild of her disobedient daughter and the child of the ballet dancer, and that she had made her will, bequeathing her whole estate to the John Knox Hospital for Idiots.

"This," Roma explained, after she had read it, "is in reply to my third letter; my first two having been ignored."

"What is it all about?" Owlet inquired.

"It means, my darling, that your great-grandmother, in the Highlands of Scotland, does not want you, and that you are to stay with me and be my child," the lady replied.

"Oh, thanks be to the Lord! that's off my mind!"

"Was the thought of going distressing you, my dear?"

"Oh, wasn't it! Ask Tom and Titus how it vexed me! Why, I thought of my grand old great-mother as Cinderella's godmother, although I know that's nonsense, and there's never no such person. But I thought she would take me away and make a princess

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of me, and I would rather be an Owlet and stay long of you."

So that was settled.

Charles Cutts still lingered at Snowden. He came more frequently to the island and stayed longer.

One day he came early in the morning and stayed very late at night, but declined Roma's invitation to him to stop all night. After he had gone Roma inquired of Annie if he ever talked of his business in Baltimore.

"Father has retired from business," she answered; "sometimes I fancy he failed. He seems to be very poor. He dresses very shabbily. And his conscience troubles him, I am sure."

Roma did not contradict this. Her thoughts ran in the same groove with Annie's. The avenger was mourning his deed.

"Annie," said the lady, with some little hesitation, "do you think that if your father had some occupation he might be happier?"

"I am sure he would be so."

"We have no bookkeeper. I have kept the books myself up to this time, but I do not wish to continue to do so. Do you think your father would take the position?"

"I wish that he would. I can sound him, madam."

"The work would be very light, and the salary liberal. I could fit up and furnish the cottage on the west side that used to be occupied by the agent of this estate. It is very pretty. You could live there and make a home for your father and retain your position as matron of the little sanitarium. And your father could be always within reach of the Maryland authorities, since it is his mania to be so."

"I will speak to father when he comes to-morrow. He is coming to breakfast. And, oh, no words can express my thankfulness to you, Mrs. Harcourt, for your great goodness," warmly exclaimed the young woman.

"No thanks, Annie, dear, if you please. It is such a pleasure to me to see well-doing and well-being that

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it seems only a sort of finer selfishness," said Roma with a smile.

The next morning Charles Cutts came over to breakfast, looking more like a wandering lunatic than ever. But after Annie had an opportunity of speaking to him alone, he brightened up wonderfully and followed Annie into the presence of Harcourt, to whom Roma had referred her, and said that he was ready and willing to take any employment in that neighborhood, and that he was especially grateful to get such an easy position in such a healthy locality.

So the affair was happily concluded.

That same morning Roma sent to Snowden for carpenters, painters and upholsterers to go to work on the premises, and in five or six days the pretty cottage was ready for occupancy, and the father and daughter moved in.

A letter came from Lawyer Pettigru, of Raleigh, summoning Harcourt to that city on business connected with his inheritance of the great Anaka property.

The affairs of the sanitarium were now in such fine working order that Roma could afford to leave the place and accompany her husband to North Carolina.

Early on a fine August morning they hoisted a red flag on the signal pole on the top of the Crest to call the Norfolk steamer when it passed to stop for passengers; and when it came and stopped, Harcourt, Roma, little Owlet—their inseparable companion—went down to the beach, entered a rowboat, "manned" by Tom and Titus, and were rowed to the side of the steamer.

So they went by water to Norfolk and by rail to Raleigh.

Thus their first wedding tour was a business journey. We need not describe it.

They saw the lawyer at Raleigh and read some documents and signed others. Then they went, accompanied by the lawyer's clerk, to Anaka and saw the manor, which was not very valuable from an agricultural point of view, saw the manor house, which was

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a large, rambling edifice of stone, and saw the mines, which were wonders, if not delights to behold.

Harcourt confirmed the positions of all the overseers that had been in his great-aunt's employment, placed an agent in the manor house, and then set out with Roma and Owlet to return home.

They went by rail to Norfolk, and from Norfolk by steam to the Isle of Storms, where they arrived at sunrise on a fine morning in the middle of the month.

They found the sanitarium quite full of little invalids, who were fast becoming little Bachusses in health and strength.

Letters awaited them from their friends in Delfcome, Scotland, congratulating them on their marriage and reminding them of their promised autumnal visit to Scotland.

There was also a letter from Dr. Shaw, giving fine accounts of the progress of the school buildings on the Goeberlin lands, and inquiring when Roma thought of going to Europe.

Roma replied to all these that she should not be ready to go as soon as she had hoped because her sanitarium was full of little children, some of whom would remain until the first of October.

Also that she would like to visit Goblin Hall and make the personal acquaintance of the teachers she had engaged and see the opening of her schools.

On the first of September, therefore, Harcourt, Roma and Owlet took another journey—a journey across country to Goblin Hall—which Harcourt had not seen since his tutoring days.

They reached the Goeberlin depot at sunset and were met by Dr. Shaw and Dr. Keech, who had both been telegraphed to expect them.

The large old family carryall from the Hall was waiting them, with a farm wagon in attendance to take their baggage.

Their party would only half fill the carryall, so they persuaded their two old friends to drive over to the Hall with them and spend the evening.

On reaching the house they found Pontius Pilate

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standing on the piazza, looking loftier, broader, more obese and more stupendous than ever. It was difficult for him to bow, except perhaps backward, but he held his hat in his hand and swung it down and back while he smiled and smiled his welcome and his "obedience."

Ceres stood behind him with her arms solemnly crossed on her bosom, her eyes lowered, and the corner of her mouth drawn down.

As the travelers got down from the carryall, Roma and Harcourt greeted the bowing and courtesying servants kindly and inquired how they had got on.

"Pompous," replied that "eberyfing was gwine on fuss chop, it was de Lor's trufe for a fac'."

"Serious" added that "all was wanity an' a vexation ob de sperrits, but w'at could dey expec' in a sinful worl'?" and put her hand on Owlet's head and told her to pray to the Lord to let her die young, for "den she might go to hebben maybe."

Before Owlet had time to assure her that she was not possessed of common sense and never would be, there was the sound of a small whirlwind heard coming with a rushing and a crackling and a laughing and a singing all together, and Ducky Darling, the little black child, with George Thomas, the bull pup, flung herself under Owlet's feet and went into convulsions of joy.

Owlet dropped down on the grass by her side, and there was a rare hugging and kissing, while the bull pup yelled and leaped about them.

The grown people went into the house, leaving the children outside to follow at their own sweet will. The little ones were in no hurry.

"Oh, Owey! Owey! Owey! Owey!" was the only articulate sound that Ducky Darling could utter at first.

"Oh, you darling thing! I am so glad to see you. I love you so much!" responded Owlet, showering kisses and caresses on the little creature. "And George Thomas, too! You dear, sweet doggie!" she added, fondling the pup, who was impatient to be noticed.

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"An' oo bastet an' oo tazy tilt pieces! Dutty Darn did save dem for oo," Dorcas contrived to express.

"You did? Oh, you sweet thing! How good you are! I was grieving about my crazy quilt squares."

"Dutty Darn divved dem to mammy, an' s'e pitted 'em in de bottom oz s'e's bid chiss."

"Oh, Ducky, Darling! you are possessed of common sense! That's why I love you!" Owlet exclaimed with enthusiasm.

"Is me?" cooed the black child.

"And you can talk ever so much better than you used to."

"Tan me?"

"Yes, indeed, you can."

"Dutty Darn feeded Deorge Thomas, too; an' Deorge Thomas s'eeped 'long oz Dutty Darn."

"Oh, you darling! you darling! to take care of everything I cared for!"

Rapid footsteps were heard approaching from the direction of the henhouse.

"Look yere, Dorcas! Wot yo' mean come bodderin' little miss de berry min'it she come here? How do, Miss Cafferine? Lor', how yo's growed! Ole Marse Pa'son Shaw done tole us all w'er yo' was foun'; Lor'! I t'ought dat chile would a-broke her heart! Did nuffin' 'tall but hug up George Thomas an' ky! She goed in de brush nex' day an' pick up ebery scrap ob eberyt'ing 'longin' to you, an' fotch to me to keep fo' yo'. An' kyed!—oh, Lor', how dat chile did ky! Had to tell her more lies to quiet her dan ebber I tole in all my life 'fo'!— Miss Cafferine was comin' home to-day, an' Miss Cafferine was comin' home to-morrow. An' she, she keep on hopin'—po' yittle fing!"

"But then, don't you know if you tell stories you will go to the dark, dark world below, where there is no sky, and no water, nor grass, nor trees, nor nothing, and the ground is like cinders?" solemnly demanded Owlet.

"Lor', Miss Cafferine, yo' been dere to see?" inquired the hen-woman with a little giggle.

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"No, I have not been there, but I have seen it inside of myself when I've been wicked."

"Good Lord delibber us!" exclaimed Hera uneasily, and to change the subject to a more agreeable one she inquired, "Been makin' any crazy quilts or rag carpet lately, Miss Cafferine?"

"No, I haven't begun any yet. I have been helping to make nightgowns for the little sick children Lady has got in her sanctiflorium. But oh, Hera!" she suddenly exclaimed, before the woman could express her surprise—"oh, Hera! I have got such a splendid thing for you—such a splendid thing! I bought it in Washington at the notion store."

"What a lady yo' are, Miss Cafferine! It's jus' like yo' to fink ob ebberybody! Fanky, miss. But wot is it, Miss Cafferine?" inquired the woman, whose imagination conjured up visions of "splendid" plaid shawls and bandanna turbans of all the colors of the rainbow and everything else.

"It is a little tool no bigger than a bodkin, but different; and with it you can take all the tiny little bits of string and yarn and thread and silk that is good for nothing in the world else and you can work up a beautiful shaggy mat, with the shags on top, and a plain bottom—make a beautiful mat with only that tool and bits of waste string. Just think of it!"

Hera did think of it, but she thought she would rather have the shawl or the bandanna.

"And you can save everything—every scrap of spool cotton, even if it is only an inch long. I'll show you how to do it."

"Thanky, Miss Cafferine. Come, Dorcas, you must go home; Miss Cafferine's got to go in de house an' get ready for dinner."

"Come back after dinner, Ducky Darling; I have got a lovely red bead necklace for you and a doll. Poor little thing, you don't know any better than to play with dolls."

"Dolls is lubly!" said Dorcas as her mammy led her away.

"Oh, Hera!" cried Owlet, calling the woman back.

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"Wot is it, Miss Cafferine?"

"You know Lady's married?"

"Course I do. Marse Pa'son Shaw 'ceived a letter from her, an' come ober yere an' tell we-dem all 'bout it. I know the youn' gemman, too! I 'members ob him in his co'rtin' days. I gwine in bime by to wish 'em joy."

"You needn't do that, Hera. They have got plenty of it. Hera, I made that match," said Owlet solemnly.

"Lor', Miss Cafferine, g'way f'om yere!"

"Indeed I did, then! I thought they were made for each other; and being such a friend to the family I seegested it to Mr. William when we was coming home in the cars that time when I was lost, and he found me, you know. Did you know Mr. William found me?"

"Oh, yes; Marse Pa'son Shaw tole we-dem all 'bout dat, too."

"Well, when I got home and saw Lady, I spoke a good word for Mr. William to her; and that's the way I made the match. You see, Hera, I 'prove of marrying. See, now, how happy you and Nace is, with your little family. And there is Uncle 'Rusalem and Aunt Wilet, on Lady's island, just as fond of each other as two turkey doves—though she does beat him when he gits drunk, but it's for his good, you know, like giving him physic when he's sick. But as for single people—oh, my! Just look at Aunt Serious! She's awful! And Uncle Paunchus is awfuller! I 'prove of marriage—indeed I do! Don't you, Hera?"

"Ye—es, Miss Cafferine; in reason—in reason, I do."

"It is so selfish to live single. It's 'I by myself I.'"

"Yes, Miss Cafferine."

"I am going to be married, Hera."

"Awful Lord!"

"I am. So you needn't stare. I think it my duty to do so."

"For de Lord's sake, when, Miss Cafferine?"

"Oh, I don't know exactly when, but some day, you may be sure."

"An' who to, Miss Cafferine?"

"I don't know that, either. There's old Dr. Wash-

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burn. He is such a dear old gentleman! But he never seems to think of such a thing. And nobody will seegest it to him. And, of course, I can't seegest it myself."

"'Course you can't, Miss Cafferine."

"Well, and there's Titus Blair."

"Who he, Miss Cafferine?"

"Oh, he's the little red-haired and freckle-faced little gentleman who rows the boat. He's very nice and good, but I think he is too young to have such notions put in his head."

"How old is he, Miss Cafferine?"

"He isn't old at all. He's young. Twelve years young."

"Den you is younger'n he is. You is not seben yet, till nex' November. You's on'y six now."

"Don't talk such nonsense, Hera. I'm little, but I'm awful old—too old for Titus. I do defer Dr. Washburn, but I am afraid he will depart for a better world before I grow big enough to marry him."

"Awful Lord! Dere! Run in an' wash yo face an' han's for dinner, Miss Cafferine, honey, dey'll be waitin' fo' yo'," said Hera as she took Ducky Darling by the hand and led her away.

The pup halted between two opinions for a moment and then turned and trotted after the black child.

Owlet went into the house and ran against Ceres, who seemed to be waiting for her.

"Oh, Aunt Serious, excuse me. I didn't see you," said the child.

"Come along o' me, Miss Cafferine. I am to show w'ich is yo' yoom. It's all wanity an' wexation ob de sperrits!"

"You are!" retorted Owlet as she followed the lugubrious creature upstairs to the pretty little hall chamber which had been prepared for her, where her trunk had been carried and where, without the help of Ceres, she made a neat toilet for dinner.

In half an hour all were assembled around the dinner table, where Pontius, in high feather, waited.

The evening was spent in the old drawing room.

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At ten o'clock the two visitors took leave and were driven over to Goeberlin in the brougham by Puck.

The next day Paul Stone came over to pay his respects to the newly arrived pair.

He looked worn and haggard, yet was his countenance lighted up by the fervor of spirit in which he went about doing good. It was his first meeting with Harcourt, and although the latter had married the only woman that Paul Stone had ever loved, yet was the young minister's greeting of his successful rival both cordial and sincere.

Accompanied by Paul Stone, Mr. and Mrs. Harcourt drove over to Goeberlin to inspect the school buildings, which were now completely finished and furnished.

Every detail of the work proved perfectly satisfactory.

Roma warmly thanked the young clergyman for his valuable services as superintendent, and the three returned together to dine at Goblin Hall.

Early in the next week the two teachers arrived at Goeberlin.

Roman went in person to meet them at the railway station and brought them home with her to Goblin Hall.

They were a widow of forty and her daughter of nineteen years old. They were cultured women and seemed to belong to that class of which it is often said that they had "seen better days."

Mrs. Stanley, who was as bright, cheery and helpful as Annie Moss herself, laughingly disclaimed ever having known any better days than the present. She had been a workwoman ever since she was fifteen years of age, when she began to work as "teacher-pupil" in a ladies' boarding school, where she instructed the younger children in payment for her own tuition in the higher classes; she had continued to teach in one school or another until she was married, after she was married and after she became a widow. Her daughter Mary had followed in her own footsteps.

Roma was pleased with both the women and made

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arrangements for them to live at Goblin Hall during the months of her own absence in Europe, after which a house should be taken for them in the village.

Mr. and Mrs. Harcourt spent a fortnight at Goblin Hall and then, having seen the free school for colored boys and girls in full operation under the charge of Mrs. Stanley as principal, Miss Stanley as assistant and the Rev. Paul Stone as superintendent, they returned to the Isle of Storms, accompanied by Dr. Shaw, to make preparations for their voyage to Europe.

The parting between Owlet and Ducky Darling had been a tempestuous one on the part of the black child. It took George Thomas, a music box and two dolls to console her.

It was now near the first of October and growing cold on the seagirt isle.

During the season more than sixty suffering infants had been received and nursed on the island. Not one death had occurred there. Now early all the little ones had been taken back to their homes, completely restored to health. And before the first of October the last lingering little invalid was taken away, well and happy.

Then Mr. and Mrs. Harcourt placed the island home in the care of Dr. Washburn, Annie Moss and her father, who was now only a wreck of humanity, with one mania—to wait his arrest and trial. He was never arrested. I do not know why.

On the tenth of October Mr. and Mrs. Harcourt, with little Owlet and the Rev. Dr. Shaw, sailed for Europe.

Shall we accompany them thither and describe their voyage and arrival, their reception by their friends, the Grays, their tour of the Continent, and all the rest of it?

Well, hardly, lest our readers begin to think that this is going to be a story without an end.

We will only notice briefly the most important items.

As the season of equinoctial storms was quite past

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and the season of winter not come, they had a delightful voyage across the Atlantic.

They were met at Liverpool by Mr. Gray and his two stepsons, Abbot and Rudolph Elde.

The capers of the two last-mentioned on meeting their beloved cousins had best be imagined. If we were to relate them conscientiously, we should be accused of exaggeration. Let it be enough to say that Owlet was perfectly convinced that they were not possessed of common sense and never would or could be so endowed.

A few hours' riding brought them to Delfcome, where the consul had a beautiful home in the suburbs.

Mrs. Gray received her niece with a great joy of laughing and crying, and the two girls greeted their cousin by marriage with delight.

Mr. Toomie received the visitors with timid gravity, characteristic of the little parson.

From sheer propinquity, the Rev. Tim had fallen in love with Mabie Gray, though in a very sedate and clerical fashion. I do not think his sentiment met any response from her.

We will say nothing of the dinners, receptions and other entertainments that were given in honor of the visitors during the following few weeks, nor of their tour through Scotland.

During their wanderings through the Highlands Roma found herself in the neighborhood of Arbuthnot, and it occurring to her to take Owlet and call upon Mistress Arbuthnot, and find out from herself whether she really meant to discard her little great-grandchild.

Roma left all the others of the party at the village inn—the Arbuthnot Arms—and taking little Owlet with her, walked to the castle and sent in her card.

She was admitted at once into a large, old-fashioned sitting room, warmed by an open wood fire that reminded her of Maryland.

In a large invalid chair, by the side of this fire, sat an ancient dame wrapped in shawls.

After a few words of introduction, Roma presented the child.

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"Guid guide us! It is my ain Katie come back to me a wean!" said the ancient woman, holding the child's hand and gazing into her face. "Madam, gi'en ye can prove this is the grandchild of my dochter Katie, ye'll mak' me the happiest woman i' the three kingdoms."

Roma was well able to prove the identity of Catherine Nouvellini as the great-grandchild and legal heiress of Mistress Arbuthnot, of Arbuthnot, and had the satisfaction of knowing that the old lady made her will, leaving all her real estate and personal property to her.

"And now, Lord, let Thy servant depart in peace," were the last words of the old lady of Arbuthnot, for she died soon after signing that will.

By that document William Harcourt and Roma were made guardians of the heiress and trustees of her estate.

The Harcourts spent the autumn in traveling over the continent of Europe. They made a farewell visit to their friends at Delfcome, and in the middle of May sailed for New York.

On reaching the Isle of Storms they found all well there, and from Goblin Hall they received letters full of satisfactory news.

Very soon they resumed their life's work—the application of their united fortunes and energies to good uses.

In addition to the sanitarium on the Isle of Storms they founded a small school there for the benefit of the fishermen's boys and girls and others who might need it.

They also established a school at Anaka for the instruction of the children of the miners and agricultural laborers.

What remains to be said?

Only this, that of this young married pair it might be written they were possessed of "a thirst to give, a solemn, quiet passion to bless, a delight at beholding well being."

THE END

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In point of publication, "Darnley" is that work by Mr. James which follows "Richelieu," and, if rumor can be credited, it was owing to the advice and insistence of our own Washington Irving that we are indebted primarily for the story, the young author questioning whether he could properly paint the difference in the characters of the two great cardinals. And it is not surprising that James should have hesitated; he had been eminently successful in giving to the world the portrait of Richelieu as a man, and by attempting a similar task with Wolsey as the theme, was much like tempting fortune. Irving insisted that "Darnley" came naturally in sequence, and this opinion being supported by Sir Walter Scott, the author set about the work.

As a historical romance "Darnley" is a book that can be taken up pleasurably again and again, for there is about it that subtle charm which those who are strangers to the works of G. P. R. James have claimed was only to be imparted by Dumas.

If there was nothing more about the work to attract especial attention, the account of the meeting of the kings on the historic "field of the cloth of gold" would entitle the story to the most favorable consideration of every reader.

There is really but little pure romance in this story, for the author has taken care to imagine love passages only between those whom history has credited with having entertained the tender passion one for another, and he succeeds in making such lovers as all the world must love.

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The one book of this gifted author which is best remembered, and which will be read with pleasure for many years to come, is "Captain Brand," who, as the author states on his title page, was a "pirate of eminence in the West Indies." As a sea story pure and simple, "Captain Brand" has never been excelled, and as a story of piratical life, told without the usual embellishments of blood and thunder, it has no equal.

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THE SPIRIT OF THE BORDER. A Romance of the Early Settlers in the Ohio Valley. By Zane Grey. Cloth, 12mo. with four illustrations by J. Watson Davis. Price, $1.00.

A book rather out of the ordinary is this "Spirit of the Border." The main thread of the story has to do with the work of the Moravian missionaries in the Ohio Valley. Incidentally the reader is given details of the frontier life of those hardy pioneers who broke the wilderness for the planting of this great nation. Chief among these, as a matter of course, is Lewis Wetzel, one of the most peculiar, and at the same time the most admirable of all the brave men who spent their lives battling with the savage foe, that others might dwell in comparative security.

Details of the establishment and destruction of the Moravian "Village of Peace" are given at some length, and with minute description. The efforts to Christianize the Indians are described as they never have been before, and the author has depicted the characters of the leaders of the several Indian tribes with great care, which of itself will be of interest to the student.

By no means least among the charms of the story are the vivid word-pictures of the thrilling adventures, and the intense paintings of the beauties of nature, as seen in the almost unbroken forests.

It is the spirit of the frontier which is described, and one can by it, perhaps, the better understand why men, and women, too, willingly braved every privation and danger that the westward progress of the star of empire might be the more certain and rapid. A love story, simple and tender, runs through the book.

RICHELIEU. A tale of France in the reign of King Louis XIII. By G. P. R. James. Cloth, 12mo. with four illustrations by J. Watson Davis. Price, $1.00.

In 1829 Mr. James published his first romance, "Richelieu," and was recognized at once as one of the masters of the craft.

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Take it all in all, "Horseshoe Robinson" is a work which should be found on every book-shelf, not only because it is a most entertaining story, but because of the wealth of valuable information concerning the colonists which it contains. That it has been brought out once more, well illustrated, is something which will give pleasure to thousands who have long desired an opportunity to read the story again, and to the many who have tried vainly in these latter days to procure a copy that they might read it for the first time.

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Who can read of the beginning of that sweet life, named Mara, which came into this world under the very shadow of the Death angel's wings, without having an intense desire to know how the premature bud blossomed? Again and again one lingers over the descriptions of the character of that baby boy Moses, who came through the tempest, amid the angry billows, pillowed on his dead mother's breast.

There is no more faithful portrayal of New England life than that which Mrs. Stowe gives in "The Pearl of Orr's Island."

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